

Book 06 – The Road to Revenge

Chapter 1

Hillman was being gripped so tightly by Linley's claws that his clothes were torn open. Scarlet blood slowly leaked out, staining his clothes red.

But Hillman didn't notice in the slightest.

Staring at Linley, Hillman said in a downcast voice, "Linley, calm down first."

"Tell me." Linley was staring at Hillman.

Hillman said solemnly. "The troop of Knights following you is about to arrive. For now, let's not allow others to know about the affairs of your clan. Come with me first." Hillman shook his shoulders loose of Linley's claws, then grabbed Linley's scaled arms and with the intention of pulling him to the ancestral halls...only to find that he was unable to budge Linley.

"Linley!" Hillman turned his head, a spark of anger in his eyes.

"Uncle Hillman, I know how to act."

Linley's face was deeply sunken, but he took a deep breath, retracting the scales on his arms into his body, returning to normal. Just as he once more returned the 'Slaughterer' to his case and held it, Linley could hear the sounds of hoof steps outside drawing near.

The troops of Knights of the Radiant Temple had finally arrived.

Linley turned, glancing at them coldly, but paid them no mind. He said directly to Hillman, "Uncle Hillman, lead the way."

"Alright."

Seeing that Linley was able to calm down, Hillman felt a little bit better. He immediately led Linley into the ancestral hall's direction. Linley's face remained sunken. At this moment, aside from Linley himself, perhaps nobody knew that beneath that calm expression, there lay hidden an incredibly deep, painful wound.

Neither the Shadowmouse Bebe nor Doehring Cowart made a sound.

They were connected to Linley's soul. Naturally, they could feel the unimaginable grief and pain which Linley was currently suffering.

The wind rose, catching up and hurling into the air countless leaves which had been lying on the unimaginably ancient stone tiled grounds.

“Creaaaak.”

Hillman pushed open the door to the ancestral hall, then turned to look back at Linley. Holding the warblade ‘Slaughterer’, Linley stepped inside, his face calm. But his gaze was fixed upon those rows of spirit tablets placed in the middle of the ancestral hall. With Linley’s current vision, he could clearly read the words on the newest spirit tablet, located at the front.

There were only two words on the front. “Hogg Baruch.”

Linley felt his mind growing dizzy, as though he were having a hallucination. But he still stood there, unmoving. And then, still carrying the ‘Slaughterer’, Linley stepped forward to the stone platform in front of the spirit tablets, placing the ‘Slaughterer’ on top of the platform.

Linley looked at the spirit tablet, a peaceful smile appearing on his face. In a soft voice, Linley said, “Father. I’m back.”

“I know that all your life, your greatest desire was that we recover our ancestral heirloom, as well as regain the bygone splendor of our clan, the Dragonblood Warrior clan.” Linley spoke very carefully, as though he were afraid to startle someone. His voice was so gentle, so careful.

Linley stared at the spirit tablet. “I didn’t disappoint you. I have already brought back to the Baruch clan, to the Dragonblood Warrior clan, our ancestral heirloom, the warblade ‘Slaughterer’.”

“Now...I have already brought back the ‘Slaughterer’. And very soon, I will restore our Dragonblood Warrior clan to glory. I will make sure the entire Yulan continent knows of the splendor of our Dragonblood Warrior clan, and will make sure everyone in the Yulan continent knows your name.”

“All of this, I will accomplish. I so swear.”

Suddenly, a fiendish look appeared on Linley’s face. “But of course, before I do all of these things. I will avenge you.”

There was no question at all in his mind. His father, Baruch, had been killed by someone.

Otherwise, based on his father's prowess as a warrior of the sixth rank, as well as a man in the prime of his health, he couldn't have died due to any ordinary illness. And what's more, if he had died of illness, Hillman wouldn't have acted so secretly. Linley's intuition was telling him that his father's death was no ordinary death!

"The person who caused you to die. I will make sure he dies as well!"

Within Linley's eyes, once more there seemed to be a hint of that cold, dark gold color of the eyes of the Armored Razorback Wurm. That terrifying dark golden color.

Linley fiercely turned to stare at Hillman. "Uncle Hillman, tell me. How did my father die, exactly? In addition, where was my father buried? Also, you said my father died three months ago? Why didn't you tell me?"

Hillman opened his mouth, but did not speak.

"Linley, first calm down," Hillman finally said slowly.

Calm down?

How could he calm down?

"I wish so much that my father could be here and personally see this warblade, 'Slaughterer', with his own eyes. I long to tell my father that I have become a Dragonblood Warrior. I deeply desire to see my father's smile, hear his gratified laughter. See the pride on his face when I assume the Dragonform! However...all of this is now impossible."

Linley felt as though his heart had been sliced by knives.

And Hillman was asking him to calm down?

Linley wanted to angrily rebuke Hillman, but he restrained from doing so. Taking in a deep, unwilling breath, he swallowed his rage. Staring at Hillman, Linley said, "Uncle Hillman, tell me everything which happened. I want to know everything."

"Your father died three months ago. But before he died, his instructions to me were that only after you had the power of a warrior of the seventh rank could I tell you. Otherwise, I cannot tell you the circumstances surrounding his death." Hillman said solemnly.

"A warrior of the seventh rank?"

"Yes." Hillman nodded slightly. "This was the reason why I went to the Institute to look for you, but didn't inform you of your father's death or why he died. Your father's dying wishes were that I was not to allow you to know of his death, so that you could calmly focus on your studies."

Hillman looked at Linley. "Linley, it isn't that I'm not willing to tell you. It's that this was your father's dying wish. I cannot go against it. Only if you are able to become a warrior of the seventh rank, would I be willing to tell you everything."

Linley understood.

A warrior of the seventh rank?

Linley withdrew a leather-wrapped book from his clothes and handed it to Hillman.

"This is?" Hillman looked at it with surprise.

"A magus' proof of rank." Linley's face was calm.

Every single magus, from the day he began to be evaluated, would be issued a certificate with his proof of rank. Each time he advanced a rank, there would be a record of it.

Hillman opened the book and saw that under the 'wind-style' and 'earth-style' entries, there were seven stars.

"Seventh rank...a seventh rank dual-element magus?" Hillman was stunned. He stared disbelievingly at Linley.

How old was Linley?

Only seventeen.

What did a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank represent? Hillman wasn't too clear on the specifics, but he knew that in the entire Kingdom of Fenlai, the most powerful magus present was a magus of the eighth rank. But that was an old man, well over a hundred years old.

Hillman remembered how, when he joined the army, there was a magus of the seventh rank who had arrived at the same time. He remembered the glory, the pomp of it all.

But now, little Linley, whom he had watched growing up, had become in the blink of an eye a dual-element magus of the seventh rank.

"This...this is real?" Hillman asked an extremely stupid question. Hillman knew very well that this certificate of rank definitely couldn't be fake.

"Uncle Hillman. Now you can tell me what happened, right?" Linley stared at Hillman.

Hillman nodded, then headed for the private room behind the ancestral hall. A few moments later, he came out. Walking over to Linley, he withdrew an envelope from his clothes. Presenting it to Linley, he softly said, "This was left behind by your father, right before he died. Once you read it, you will understand."

His hands trembling, Linley reached out and accepted the envelope.

There weren't any words on the envelope.

He opened the envelope and withdrew the letter. The letter had two full pages of content.

"Linley: By the time you actually read this letter, I most likely would have died a long, long time ago."

"Towards you and Wharton, my heart is filled with boundless remorse, but there is no way for me to do right by you two any longer. I only hope that you two will be able to live for a long period of time in peace, which is why I have instructed your Uncle Hillman to only provide this letter to you when you have become a warrior of the seventh rank."

When he read this, Linley's heart felt sour.

"Let me live for a long period of time in peace? I imagine that father never had expected me to become a magus of the seventh rank so quickly. After all, based on the normal rate of progression, from the sixth rank to the seventh rank would take a considerable amount of time."

"Linley, within my heart, I have held a secret for many years. Your mother did not actually die when giving birth to Wharton."

These words from his father caused Linley's heart to shudder.

Ever since he was a child, Linley had known that his mother had died when giving birth to Wharton. But apparently...that was a lie.

"That year, when your mother was pregnant with Wharton, both of us were very happy. But the medical facilities at Wushan township were simply too poor, so I

went with your mother to Fenlai City. Within Fenlai City, your mother safely gave birth to Wharton. Little Wharton was very adorable, and both of us were overjoyed. Shortly after he was born, filled with joy, your mother and I took young Wharton to the Radiant Temple to pray for Wharton to be blessed. That day, both your mother and I were extremely happy. Afterwards, we left the Radiant Temple and stayed overnight at a hotel in Fenlai City.”

“That night, a group of mysterious people came to the hotel and forcibly abducted your mother. Totally outnumbered, I was only able to protect young Wharton...but I did see that on the arm of one of the assailants, there was a red, spider-like birthmark.”

As he read this, Linley himself felt as though he had been transported back to that night, ten years ago.

Under the combined attack of many assailants, unable to ward them all off, his father had only been able to protect Wharton, and could only watch powerlessly, unable to save his beloved wife.

“I know that this group of people was definitely not an ordinary group of people. The weakest of them was a warrior of the fourth rank, while the strongest was even stronger than me. Fortunately, their target was only your mother, as otherwise I would’ve died long ago. Someone capable of mobilizing a squad such as this, definitely would be a major figure in Fenlai City. I didn’t dare to go public on this affair. I took little Wharton back home and told everyone else that your mother died in childbirth. Only your Uncle Hillman and Housekeeper Hiri know this secret.”

Seeing this, Linley’s mind was filled with questions.

Within that gang of people, the strongest was even stronger than his father, but they didn’t care about his father, only about abducting his mother. But why was his mother worth their time to abduct?

“I couldn’t let you know about this. During these past ten or so years, I have always buried this secret deep in my heart. I didn’t dare tell anyone...and I couldn’t even go by myself to investigate your mother’s whereabouts, or to find out if she was alive or dead, or who that group of people was. I didn’t dare.”

His father’s words caused Linley’s heart to feel so much pain that it clenched.

“I am the successor to the leadership of the clan of the Dragonblood Warriors. At the very least, I had to raise you until you were grown. I cannot allow the Baruch lineage to come to an end in my hands. Year after year, I could only secretly endure...but every night, I found it difficult to fall asleep. The question of whether your mother

was alive or dead constantly tormented me. I have endured...I have endured eleven years!"

"Linley, you have made me incredibly proud. First, you became a student at the number one magus institute in the Yulan continent. And then, you became one of the top geniuses there, at the Ernst Institute. I am filled with confidence towards you. What's more, even little Wharton's density of Dragonblood in his veins has reached the requisite level. I am extremely proud. For both of my sons to be so outstanding...I feel that I have done right by the ancestors of the Baruch clan! But despite all of this, I still did not dare to investigate your mother's whereabouts, because Wharton still needed a large amount of gold to sustain his costly studies."

"And so I have endured for eleven years. But when you came back from the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and gave me that large sack of magicite crystals, I knew...finally, I could give up everything and go investigate whether your mother is alive or not. Although your mother has not come back in the past eleven years, and there is a probably 80% to 90% chance that she is dead, I am unwilling to give up. Even if I die, I will avenge her."

Seeing this, Linley's hands began to tremble again.

Linley understood now. In the past, because he had to support the burden of Wharton's tuition, his father didn't dare to risk his life in investigating his mother's whereabouts. But when he, Linley, had brought back that sack of magicite crystals worth 80,000 gold coins, his father no longer had any burdens left.

"Finally able to go investigating, I altered my appearance and put on a disguise as I snuck into Fenlai City. I began investigating what happened that year."

"But too much time had passed. Knowing that one of the assailants had a red spider birthmark on his upper arm, I spent an entire year searching. Finally, I found that man with the red spider birthmark. Following up on this clue, I continued to investigate. Slowly...I found out who it was that had stood behind this group of assailants."

"This group of assailants were directed by a member of the current royal clan of the Kingdom of Fenlai. And that person...is none other than the younger brother of the King of Fenlai: Duke Patterson [Bo'de'sen]!"

Chapter 2

In the Yulan continent, only an Emperor of an Empire had the authority to give his siblings the title of 'Prince'.

The status of a 'Prince' of an Empire was roughly equivalent to that of a 'King' in one of the kingdoms. At most, a King could confer the title of 'Duke' upon his siblings. That was the limit.

The 'Grand Dukes' ruling over the Duchies were in fact nothing more than Dukes as well.

Empire. Kingdom. Duchy. The ranks progressively went down at each level.

Duke Patterson?

The younger brother of the King of Fenlai?

Linley knew very well that the Boleyn clan, the royal clan of the kingdom of Fenlai, was an extremely powerful clan. Both of the Boleyn brothers were extremely powerful warriors. King Clayde was known as the pride of Fenlai, precisely because he was also a warrior of the ninth rank.

As for Patterson, although he couldn't match up to his older brother, he too was a warrior of the seventh rank. At the very least, he was considered a powerful person.

"Duke Patterson?" Linley's heart was filled with a hint of a killing intent.

Linley continued to read. "Disguising myself as a servant, I snuck my way into Duke Patterson's manor. After experiencing countless dangers and using a few special methods, I was able to kidnap the leader of that mysterious group, a warrior of the seventh rank. After I used some special interrogation methods, he finally confessed...that his actions were done at the direction of Duke Patterson. But according to what this man said, after they kidnapped your mother Lina, she was sent away under Duke Patterson's orders via a different troop. Clearly, behind Duke Patterson as well, there was another figure controlling things."

"Before I was able to finish the interrogation, the disappearance of the warrior of the seventh rank aroused the suspicions of Duke Patterson. Although I had made preparations, over the course of killing several experts and fleeing from Fenlai City, I was heavily wounded as well. I carefully snuck back home. Aside from your Uncle Hillman, I didn't let anyone else know. I knew that my injury was too severe, and that I wouldn't have too much time left. That's why I ended up leaving this letter for you."

“Linley, your father wasn’t a good father. I’ve always been too cold and severe with you. I don’t ask for your forgiveness; I only hope that you will be cool-headed. Now that you have the power of the seventh rank, most likely you will have the ability to do some investigating. But you must be careful, careful, careful. Neither I nor your mother Lina wish for you to die because of us.”

“Linley, I’ll be leaving now. As of now, you are the leader of our Baruch clan. I entrust the clan and everything in it to you.”

“At this moment, how dearly do I desire to see the warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, with my own eyes. But I know now that this was just a wild hope. Linley...work hard. The clan now depends on you and little Wharton. In your father’s life, the thing which he is the most proud of is you, and little Wharton. Two wonderful sons.”

On the signature, there was a bloodstain.

Flames erupted from Linley’s hands.

“Hiss...” In the blink of an eye, this letter was burnt to ashes.

Hillman, standing off to the side, looked at Linley.

Linley had just burnt the last testament of his father to ashes. But Hillman wasn’t angry; in fact, he secretly nodded in approval. Although this letter was a legacy, it also contained many secrets. If it fell into the wrong hands, it would be catastrophic.

Linley turned his head to look at Hillman. “Uncle Hillman. I want to entrust you with something.”

“Go ahead.” Hillman looked at Linley.

Hillman had already made up his mind to assist Linley in getting vengeance.

Linley stretched his arms out, picking up the warblade ‘Slaughterer’, then turned to look at Hillman. “Uncle Hillman, this warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, is the ancestral heirloom of our Baruch clan. I hope that you can hand this warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, to my little brother Wharton in the O’Brien Empire. I want you to personally deliver it!”

“O’Brien Empire? Then here...” Hillman was beginning to worry about Linley.

Linley said seriously, “Uncle Hillman, don’t be worried. As a dual-element magus of the seventh rank, even the Radiant Church holds me in extremely high regard. Even

King Clayde, the ruler of Fenlai, was extremely courteous to me. My safety is not something you need to be concerned about.”

Hillman was just a warrior. He didn’t fully understand the what being a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank truly meant.

In fact, he didn’t even know that Linley was now a master sculptor approaching the level of Proulx and Hope Jensen, with an extremely high status.

“If that’s the case, then...” Hillman frowned.

“After you hand this warblade, ‘Slaughterer’, over to my younger brother, assist Grandpa Hiri and stay by my younger brother’s side. Everything here, I can and will handle by myself.” Linley’s voice was deep, and it carried a hint of frost.

In the entire Holy Union, he was alone now. He had no family here anymore. What did he have to fear?

Linley had already made up his mind to avenge his father, as well as find out what happened to his mother. Was his mother alive or dead? In the depths of his heart, Linley was still hoping that his mother was alive. Although the chances were beyond slim, Linley was not willing to give up.

“Stay in the O’Brien Empire?” Hillman was quiet for a moment. After all, he had family here in Wushan township.

But for him, as a warrior of the sixth rank, anywhere in the world he went, he would be able to make a living for himself.

“Uncle Hillman, you can take your entire family with you. In addition, take this magicrystal card with you. This magicrystal card has not been imprinted yet, and has a million gold coins within it. Take this magicrystal card with you, all the way to the O’Brien Empire.”

From within his clothes, Linley withdrew a single magicrystal card and handed it to Hillman.

“A million gold coins?” Hillman stared at Linley in astonishment.

A million gold coins was an absolute fortune. When Hogg was still alive, for the sake of a few thousand gold coins, he had to sell off his clan’s possessions. Even if he sold off the entire ancestral home, he might not be able to come up with much more than a hundred thousand gold coins. But now, in the blink of an eye, Linley was handing over a magicrystal card with a million gold coins on it.

"Linley, you...where did you get this money from?" Hillman had to ask.

"Uncle Hillman, you don't need to ask. In the future, you will know." Linley's heart, at this moment, was filled with grief and rage. He was in no mood to brag about his accomplishments as a sculptor.

Hillman nodded slightly.

"Linley, wait a moment." Hillman once more ran into the private room, then came back out with an urn, handing it to Linley.

"This is?..." Linley's gaze couldn't leave the urn. He seemed to have already guessed what this urn contained.

Hillman instructed, "Linley, these are your father's ashes. When your father died, we didn't dare to publicly announce it. We didn't even dare to bury him. Our only choice was to place his cremated ashes within the private room as we awaited your return."

Linley accepted the cremation urn. He felt that it was heavy. So heavy.

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The desolate wind howled. Not too far from Wushan township, there was a cemetery filled with countless tombs. At this time, though, an extremely lavish tombstone had just been erected. The short-haired Linley was currently quietly seated cross-legged in front of it.

Linley had spent a full night erecting this tombstone. Based on Linley's current level of ability, carrying a few boulders was child's play. And, given that Linley already had reached the level of a master in sculpting, naturally he was able to carve the boulder into a lavishly beautiful tombstone.

The desolate wind howled. Linley just sat there quietly.

"Linley." Hillman was carrying the warblade 'Slaughterer' on his back in the case. He appeared in front of Linley.

Linley didn't open his eyes. He only said, "Uncle Hillman, I've entrusted the warblade 'Slaughterer' to you. I entrust my younger brother, Wharton, to you and Grandpa Hiri as well. Be safe on your way there. I won't send you off."

Hillman looked at the back of Linley, still seated cross-legged. Then he took another look at the tombstone. Finally, he nodded, then silently departed.

Hillman left.

He had left, taking the warblade 'Slaughterer' with him.

From this day forward, with the ancient ancestral manor of the Baruch clan, there was no one left aside from Linley and the servants.

Suddenly...Linley opened his eyes. He stared at the tombstone.

"Father. I swear to you that I will make them pay a heavy price." Linley immediately turned and left. The Shadowmouse, Bebe, still stood on Linley's shoulders, but he seemed to be afraid to make any noise at all.

"Lord Hogg has passed away? This...this is..." A group of citizens of Wushan township were currently in mourning for Hogg's passing.

"What a wonderful nobleman he was. How could he die like this? Who knows what the future of Wushan township will be like, now. All these years, Lord Hogg has maintained such a low taxation rate. Sometimes, he would even have to pay out of pocket to the kingdom. Where will anyone possibly find another such wonderful noble?" All of the citizens of Wushan township remembered and were thankful for Hogg's benevolence.

Currently, in front of the Baruch manor, strips of white funeral cloths were hung. Linley was dressed in a set of mourning clothes as well. He was silently kneeling in front of the memorial spirit tablet set up in front of the main hall. The little Shadowmouse, Bebe, was also kneeling next to Linley, not making a sound. It was as though he could feel the pain Linley was suffering.

Seven days of ritual filial mourning.

Despite the filial mourning being late.

This was the first day of mourning.

"Master Linley, Lord Guillermo is currently waiting for you." The captain of that squad of Knights of the Radiant Church said softly by Linley's side.

Linley turned his head, glancing at him coldly. The captain couldn't help but feel his heart shudder.

"Seven days of ritual filial mourning. Within these seven days, I will not pay attention to anyone or anything." Linley said coldly, and then he fell silent again.

The captain couldn't help but feel helpless.

But he knew what Linley was feeling right now. His father had just died. For his son to observe the ritual filial mourning rites was heaven's law and earth's principle; a matter of course. The captain of the knights immediately left the main hall, then instructed his subordinates to head to Fenlai City and report Linley's current situation to the Radiant Church.

"Young master Linley, don't be too sad."

The citizens of Wushan township came through in a steady stream to kowtow in front of Hogg's memorial spirit tablet. All of them remembered the benevolence Hogg had shown when he was alive.

Linley didn't speak. He only bowed in thanks to every single visiting citizen.

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This news quickly reached the Radiant Church, but Cardinal Lampson and Cardinal Guillermo weren't too shocked.

"Linley's father has passed away?" Guillermo nodded slightly. "No wonder back when Linley became a dual-element magus of the seventh rank, when I sent people to inquire about Linley's father, we weren't able to find anything. So he had already passed away."

The Radiant Church had a total of five Cardinals. Linley's matters were mostly handled by Cardinal Guillermo and Cardinal Lampson.

"Guillermo, let us quickly prepare some things, then go and pay our respects to Linley's father." Lampson suggested.

Guillermo nodded as well.

Actually, based on Hogg's own status, how could a Cardinal of the Radiant Church go to pay their respects to him? But Hogg was Linley's father, after all, and Linley's future prospects were unlimited. He had already been designated as an important future cornerstone of the Radiant Church by the church.

"Alright. It's already dark now. Then...let's head off early in the morning, tomorrow."

Once Hogg's death became openly known, due to the fact that the Kingdom of Fenlai had already designated Linley as a highly important figure, the news of his death quickly reached the royal palace of Fenlai. The speed by which they received this news was only slightly slower than the Radiant Church.

“Linley’s father died?”

Clayde nodded to himself as well. When Linley had become a dual-element magus of the seventh rank, he too had sent people to inquire about Linley’s father, and he had in fact even told Linley that his father had gone missing. As it turned out, Linley’s father really had passed away after all.

“Tomorrow morning, I’ll go pay my respects.” Clayde reached the same decision.

Aside from Clayde, many of the most important people in Fenlai City received this news from the royal palace. Many of them venerated Master Linley, while others wanted to make friends with him. Every single one of them decided to go early next morning to that little backwater, Wushan township, to pay their respects to Linley’s father.

While all of this was going on, Linley remained within his ancestral home in Wushan township, quietly observing the rites of mourning.

Chapter 3

Late at night. Linley’s bedroom.

The sound of muscles and bones rumbling could constantly be heard coming from Linley’s body, while Linley’s very skin was rising, then falling. Beads of sweat were pouring out of every single pore on Linley’s body, but Linley’s face was very calm and peaceful.

At this moment, Linley was training in accordance with the Secret Dragonblood Manual.

The first time Linley activated the Dragonblood in his veins, he was vaulted directly to the rank of warrior of the sixth rank. According to the records contained within the Secret Dragonblood Manual, the first time one trained is when one’s Dragonblood would be at the highest density, which is why the improvement would be so fast.

The further down the road the training continued, the harder it would become.

Especially upon reaching the ninth rank, if one wished to break through to the Saint-level, the amount of time that would be needed was probably more than all the other time spent combined.

“Right now, the Radiant Church highly values me. Given my status as a master sculptor, my personal status has dramatically increased. But my own personal power isn’t enough yet. Although they are courteous to me, that is primarily because of my potential. If I am to gain revenge, I don’t yet have enough personal power.”

Linley knew full well that he currently didn’t have enough power. After all, he couldn’t afford to assume the Dragonform and transform into a Dragonblood Warrior when he wanted to kill someone.

Unless the situation was critical, Linley definitely did not want to enter the Dragonblood Warrior forms. Because once it was discovered that he could transform into a Dragonblood Warrior, it would become very dangerous for him. After all, the fame of the Dragonblood Warriors was simply too great.

Once a Dragonblood Warrior entered the Saint-level, he would definitely be a peak-tier Saint-level combatant.

“Boss, you’re working too hard.” Lying on the bed, Bebe was watching Linley train.

Aside from Bebe, Doehring Cowart was also watching from the side. Doehring Cowart could clearly tell what sort of mental state Linley was in. His father had suddenly died, and he had also found out that his mother hadn’t died in childbirth after all, and had been abducted. These two pieces of news had suddenly descended upon Linley.

This sort of mental blow was far more vicious than Alice’s change of heart.

Doehring Cowart could feel the boundless hatred and murderous desires in Linley’s heart. Doehring Cowart knew very well that if Linley didn’t find an outlet for that hatred, he could very well turn into a murderous demon.

“I hope that Linley will be able to get his vengeance quickly. Otherwise, if he remains in this state for too long, the changes to his heart will become greater and greater.” Doehring Cowart was beginning to worry.

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The next morning.

Within the Baruch clan’s manor, many servants were preparing all sorts of edibles. As soon as Linley stepped out of his bedroom, he saw them bustling about.

“Linley, the people who are coming today are most likely important people. Is this how you intend to receive them?” Doehring Cowart appeared by Linley’s side.

Linley and Doehring Cowart had both guessed correctly. The important people of Fenlai City and of the Radiant Church had quickly received word of Linley's father's death. 80% to 90% of them had come to pay their respects to Linley's father, so naturally, Linley would have to receive them.

The materials that Linley had prepared could be considered not bad, but the skill of the chefs was too poor. There were only two chefs in the entire Wushan township whose cooking skills could be considered adequate.

"You are going to have these two chefs of this small township receive these major personages?" Doehring Cowart laughed.

"Let them taste some of the local dishes of my homeland. This is already quite enough." After speaking, Linley immediately went to eat breakfast. After breakfast, Linley continued to kneel in front of the memorial spirit tablet, observing the rites of filial mourning. By seven in the morning, hoof steps could be heard from outside the Baruch clan's manor.

An extremely lavish carriage parked itself outside the manor.

"Third Bro!" A familiar voice called out.

Still kneeling in the main hall, Linley turned his head and saw Yale, George, and Reynolds rush inside. Having suffered two heavy blows, Linley was currently feeling extremely depressed. But upon seeing those three bros whom he had grown up with at the Ernst Institute, a hint of a smile appeared on Linley's face.

Upon entering the main hall, Yale, George, and Reynolds all knelt down on prayer mats in the middle.

"Third Bro, I got the news last night about your father's passing. Overnight, I called over Second Bro and Fourth Bro to come along with me. I guessed that today, there are going to be many nobles present, so I also brought along several chefs from Fenlai City to come overnight as well." Yale said in a soft voice.

"Thank you." Linley could imagine how busy his three bros must have been in the past few hours.

Recruiting chefs, preparing the carriage convey. Most likely, Reynolds and George had hurried over to here directly from the Ernst Institute, meeting Yale on the road at night and then arriving here together.

"Third Bro, don't be too heartbroken." George gently patted Linley on the shoulders.

Reynolds was also by Linley's side. "Linley. No matter what happens, you will always have us three bros. No matter what happens, don't allow yourself to be struck down. Remain strong."

Linley looked at Reynolds, a hint of a smile appearing on his face.

Linley felt very warm in his heart upon hearing Reynolds, normally the most mischievous of them all, saying such words.

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"Thank you all." Linley looked at Yale. "Boss Yale, I'd like to hand over the responsibilities of hosting these nobles to you. I have no experience in this area."

Yale nodded. "Don't worry. I've brought quite a number of people over. They will definitely do a good job of receiving them."

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The carriage was golden and extremely extravagant.

The mighty knights were exhibiting their top-notch riding skills. The hoof steps were so much in lockstep, they sounded like a single great drumbeat, shaking the hearts of the citizens of Wushan township.

The denizens of Wushan township were stupefied.

“Who...who are these people?” Many denizens hadn’t seen these people in their entire lives.

When this new troop arrived outside the Baruch clan’s manor, that voice once more rang out from within the manor. “His Majesty, King Clayde of Fenlai has arrived!”

“His Majesty the King!”

All of the citizens of the town looked at each other.

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“Duke Bonalt of the Kingdom of Fenlai has arrived!”

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“Lord Bernard of the Debs clan of the Kingdom of Fenlai has arrived!”

That voice rang out again and again, causing the citizens of Wushan township to be totally speechless. What was going on? Why were so many members of the upper class congregating here at Wushan township? But the citizens of Wushan township could guess the reason.

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But Hogg was just the noble of a minor township. Could his passing cause his Majesty the King as well as two Cardinals of the Radiant Church to come? These

citizens couldn't help but think back to the triumphant image from a few days ago of Linley returning with a troop of knights at his back.

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Within the Baruch clan's main hall, Linley was still kneeling on one side.

The Cardinals, the King, the Dukes, the Marquises, the Counts, all either bowed or knelt down with sincerity, paying their respects. Although the likes of Cardinal Guillermo only bowed, without question, the only people they ever even bowed to were tremendously important figures.

But today, they were bowing to the departed Hogg.

"Linley, don't be too heartbroken." Guillermo said softly by Linley's side.

"Thank you." Linley bowed fractionally.

"Linley, your father's passing truly fills us all with regret." King Clayde also comforted Linley.

After a while.

"Linley, don't be too heartbroken." A clear voice.

Raising his head, Linley saw that Delia, dressed in simple clothes, was there, her face filled with concern.

"Thank you." Linley said in a soft voice.

Delia nodded fractionally before being led away by servants as well. One noble after another came in to pay their respects to Linley's father. Even that Bernard, leader of the Debs clan, had come to pay his respects.

"Master Linley, don't be too heartbroken." Bernard said courteously.

Linley responded with the same courteous thanks. "Thank you."

.....

“Duke Patterson of the Kingdom of Fenlai has arrived!” Suddenly, the announcing voice rang out from outside.

Linley frowned very slightly.

His father’s death was linked to this Duke Patterson. But Linley knew very well that his father had disguised himself before entering Duke Patterson’s manor. Most likely, Duke Patterson had no idea that Linley’s father was the person whom had succumbed to the severe injuries caused by his subordinates.

Patterson looked extremely similar to Clayde. Both of them had long, golden hair, with eyes that seemed hawk-like. His waist was straight as a ramrod, and he had the aura of a noble.

Entering the main hall, Patterson bowed respectfully in front of Hogg’s memorial spirit tablet.

“Master Linley, don’t be too heartbroken.” Patterson walked over to Linley and said with sincerity.

Linley raised his head and glanced at Patterson. Seeing the sincere look on Patterson’s face, he still responded with the same courteous, “Thank you.” From the surface, one couldn’t tell that Linley’s treatment of Patterson was any different from his treatment of anyone else.

Chapter 4

Late at night. Linley’s bedroom.

The sound of muscles and bones rumbling could constantly be heard coming from Linley’s body, while Linley’s very skin was rising, then falling. Beads of sweat were pouring out of every single pore on Linley’s body, but Linley’s face was very calm and peaceful.

At this moment, Linley was training in accordance with the Secret Dragonblood Manual.

The first time Linley activated the Dragonblood in his veins, he was vaulted directly to the rank of warrior of the sixth rank. According to the records contained within the Secret Dragonblood Manual, the first time one trained is when one’s Dragonblood would be at the highest density, which is why the improvement would be so fast.

The further down the road the training continued, the harder it would become.

Especially upon reaching the ninth rank, if one wished to break through to the Saint-level, the amount of time that would be needed was probably more than all the other time spent combined.

“Right now, the Radiant Church highly values me. Given my status as a master sculptor, my personal status has dramatically increased. But my own personal power isn’t enough yet. Although they are courteous to me, that is primarily because of my potential. If I am to gain revenge, I don’t yet have enough personal power.”

Linley knew full well that he currently didn’t have enough power. After all, he couldn’t afford to assume the Dragonform and transform into a Dragonblood Warrior when he wanted to kill someone.

Unless the situation was critical, Linley definitely did not want to enter the Dragonblood Warrior forms. Because once it was discovered that he could transform into a Dragonblood Warrior, it would become very dangerous for him. After all, the fame of the Dragonblood Warriors was simply too great.

Once a Dragonblood Warrior entered the Saint-level, he would definitely be a peak-tier Saint-level combatant.

“Boss, you’re working too hard.” Lying on the bed, Bebe was watching Linley train.

Aside from Bebe, Doehring Cowart was also watching from the side. Doehring Cowart could clearly tell what sort of mental state Linley was in. His father had suddenly died, and he had also found out that his mother hadn’t died in childbirth after all, and had been abducted. These two pieces of news had suddenly descended upon Linley.

This sort of mental blow was far more vicious than Alice’s change of heart.

Doehring Cowart could feel the boundless hatred and murderous desires in Linley’s heart. Doehring Cowart knew very well that if Linley didn’t find an outlet for that hatred, he could very well turn into a murderous demon.

“I hope that Linley will be able to get his vengeance quickly. Otherwise, if he remains in this state for too long, the changes to his heart will become greater and greater.” Doehring Cowart was beginning to worry.

.....

The next morning.

Within the Baruch clan's manor, many servants were preparing all sorts of edibles. As soon as Linley stepped out of his bedroom, he saw them bustling about.

"Linley, the people who are coming today are most likely important people. Is this how you intend to receive them?" Doehring Cowart appeared by Linley's side.

Linley and Doehring Cowart had both guessed correctly. The important people of Fenlai City and of the Radiant Church had quickly received word of Linley's father's death. 80% to 90% of them had come to pay their respects to Linley's father, so naturally, Linley would have to receive them.

The materials that Linley had prepared could be considered not bad, but the skill of the chefs was too poor. There were only two chefs in the entire Wushan township whose cooking skills could be considered adequate.

"You are going to have these two chefs of this small township receive these major personages?" Doehring Cowart laughed.

"Let them taste some of the local dishes of my homeland. This is already quite enough." After speaking, Linley immediately went to eat breakfast. After breakfast, Linley continued to kneel in front of the memorial spirit tablet, observing the rites of filial mourning. By seven in the morning, hoof steps could be heard from outside the Baruch clan's manor.

An extremely lavish carriage parked itself outside the manor.

"Third Bro!" A familiar voice called out.

Still kneeling in the main hall, Linley turned his head and saw Yale, George, and Reynolds rush inside. Having suffered two heavy blows, Linley was currently feeling extremely depressed. But upon seeing those three bros whom he had grown up with at the Ernst Institute, a hint of a smile appeared on Linley's face.

Upon entering the main hall, Yale, George, and Reynolds all knelt down on prayer mats in the middle.

"Third Bro, I got the news last night about your father's passing. Overnight, I called over Second Bro and Fourth Bro to come along with me. I guessed that today, there are going to be many nobles present, so I also brought along several chefs from Fenlai City to come overnight as well." Yale said in a soft voice.

"Thank you." Linley could imagine how busy his three bros must have been in the past few hours.

Recruiting chefs, preparing the carriage convey. Most likely, Reynolds and George had hurried over to here directly from the Ernst Institute, meeting Yale on the road at night and then arriving here together.

“Third Bro, don’t be too heartbroken.” George gently patted Linley on the shoulders.

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Chapter 5

The Ernst Institute did not make public high level magical incantations of the seventh rank or higher.

If you wanted to learn these higher rank spells, you would have to decide to join a faction.

"Thank you, Lord Guillermo, Lord Lampson." Linley said thankfully.

Linley couldn't help but think back to the power of the higher ranked wind spells as described in the books he had read. The higher ranked the spell, the more terrifying

its offensive potential, especially in the wind-style. Its offensive spells, in fact, could be considered the number one amongst all styles.

For example, the forbidden-level 'Dimensional Edge' spell, or the ninth-ranked spell "Void Extermination" spell.

"Linley, how about this. When we return to Fenlai City, I will send someone to inform Clayde of your decision. Clayde will, in short order, confer a writ of nobility upon you, and grant you a manor as well." Guillermo laughed.

Linley nodded.

"Linley." The nearby Lampson patted Linley on the shoulders. "You don't need to worry about any official matters for now. The only thing you need to do is train hard. I very much want to see our Radiant Church have yet another Saint-level combatant in our midst within fifty years."

"Fifty years?"

Linley was confident that within fifty years, he could become a Saint-level Dragonblood Warrior. But as for becoming a Saint-level Grand Magus in fifty years, the difficulty was too great.

"Work hard." Guillermo also patted Linley on his shoulders in a friendly way.

As the resplendent carriages made their way through the village roads, the nearby trees and lakes soon receded into the distance. In front and behind the carriages, there were rows of knights. Under this resplendent escort, they reached Fenlai City by lunchtime.

Fenlai City. Within the Debs clan's manor.

"Alice, can you forgive me?" Kalan was holding Alice's hands, staring into her eyes.

A look of helplessness was on Alice's face. She gently nodded.

What else could she do?

"Rowling [Luo'lin] is about to arrive." Alice said softly. "I'm about to go back."

Despite everything, as of right now, Alice and Kalan still were not formally man and wife. Even if they got engaged, they still would not yet be husband and wife. Only after the formal ceremony would they become husband and wife. Before the wedding, Alice still had to observe the proprieties. Every day, she would go back to her own home.

“Rowling?” Kalan couldn’t help but frown upon hearing this name.

Rowling was Kalan’s principal wife.

Because of the fame of the sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, that female figure who was the inspiration for the sculpture had also been deeply imprinted into everyone’s mind. Once Kalan formally announced his engagement, many people would be able to recognize Alice as that inspiration. In a very short period of time, the Debs family had already selected a principal wife for Kalan.

“Kalan.”

A happy voice rang out. A golden haired girl, her hair in pleats, ran over to them happily. This girl looked extremely pure and innocent, yet still possessed the aura of nobility. Especially those large, liquid eyes; they made her seem all the more adorable.

“Rowling. You came.” Kalan forced a smile on his face.

Kalan had to admit that Rowling was a very adorable girl. Perhaps nobody would refuse to be together with Rowling. Only, in Kalan’s heart, the one he truly loved really was Alice.

“Where’s Uncle Bernard?” Rowling swept the area with her big eyes.

“Father went out to handle some affairs. I expect he’ll be back soon.” Kalan replied.

Kalan knew exactly where his father had gone and what he was doing. Thanks to the pressure of the Dawson Conglomerate, the businesses of the Debs clan in the city of Fenlai had reached the point of collapse. Every day, they were losing money. If they continued suffering such losses, they might be able to hold out for another year or half year, but as time went on, even their deep pockets would eventually run dry.

What’s more, the clan couldn’t just sit there and do nothing. After all, many of the other clans in Fenlai City were eying them covetously and circling around them.

Thus...his father, Bernard, had made a very dangerous decision. To engage in the illicit mining and smuggling of water jade.

Water jade was a type of extremely valuable gemstone. Generally, it was inlaid on top of magistaffs, and was very beneficial to water-style magi. In the Kingdom of Fenlai, there was a fairly large amount of water jade deposits, and the Kingdom of Fenlai had generated an astonishing amount of wealth through water jade mining.

Because water jade was so precious, naturally there were many people who tried to engage in water jade smuggling.

But his Majesty, King Clayde, bitterly detested the smuggling of water jade. Every single merchant whom had been discovered to be smuggling water jade, King Clayde had ordered to be put to death. But because the profit margin for the smuggling of water jade was simply too enormous, perhaps 500% to 600%, there were still always merchants who were willing to brave this risk.

In the past, there was no need for the Debs clan to take such a dangerous route. But now, things were different.

Since all normal business paths had been sealed off by the Dawson Conglomerate, the only choice for the Debs clan was to smuggle!

"There shouldn't be any problems." Kalan said to himself. "The business partner which father has selected is the Minister of Finance for the Kingdom of Fenlai, the younger brother of his Majesty, Duke Patterson. With him as our partner, the chance of there being any problems should be fairly low."

Patterson was the Minister of Finance for the entire Kingdom of Fenlai.

Clayde naturally had selected the person he himself trusted the most to assume the weighty responsibility of being in charge of managing the finances of the entire kingdom.

"Uncle Bernard is back." Rowling's bright voice sounded out.

Kalan raised his head.

Bernard, his face covered with smiles, walked through the door. Seeing Rowling, he laughed. "Rowling, you are here? Have you had dinner yet?"

"Not yet," Rowling replied.

Bernard nodded. "Tonight, stay here and have dinner with your big brother Kalan. Oh, right, there's something I need to discuss with your big brother Kalan. Why don't you and Alice have a nice chat? Later, I'll have your big brother Kalan spend some time with you." As he spoke, Bernard flicked a glance at Kalan.

Kalan obediently followed by Bernard's side as the two entered a private room.

Closing the stone door, they lit the lamps.

"Father, what is it?" Kalan asked hurriedly.

A hint of satisfaction was on Bernard's face. "I've already completed my discussions with Duke Patterson. He's already agreed. But we will have to split the profits on this endeavor, fifty-fifty."

"Fifty-fifty?" Kalan stared. "Father, this Duke Patterson is too greedy. Our clan is carrying out the actual smuggling work and spending all of the upfront costs. We are even paying for the horses out of pocket. All he's doing is arranging some safe smuggling routes for us."

It wasn't that Kalan didn't understand the importance of these smuggling routes.

But for this project, the Debs clan truly had invested a massive amount of money, while Duke Patterson didn't have to spend a single coin. All he had to do was to use some of his official powers, and he would earn a huge amount of money.

"Fifty-fifty is within our range of acceptability." Bernard laughed calmly. "Duke Patterson isn't just providing us with safe smuggling routes. More importantly, he's betraying his country and betraying his elder brother. If King Clayde found out, even though Duke Patterson is his own younger brother, he most likely wouldn't be merciful to him."

Kalan nodded slightly.

Their partner was a Duke and the Minister of Finance. With him taking on such enormous risks for the sake of arranging a safe smuggling route for their clan, it was fair that he claimed half of the profits.

Bernard and Kalan exited the secret room and returned to the living room. Alice and Rowling were currently engaged in conversation.

"Oh, right. Kalan. I just heard from Patterson that in three more days, his Majesty will personally confer a rank of nobility upon Linley in the royal palace." Bernard instructed, "Prepare a gift for me. In a few days, I will give it to Linley."

Kalan nodded.

Alice, who was chatting with Rowling not too far away, couldn't help but turn her head and glance at them.

"Big brother Linley is being conferred a rank of nobility?" Alice murmured to herself.

Within the royal palace of Fenlai City.

Dozens of important ministers were lined up in orderly fashion in the court, while King Clayde was sitting up high, overlooking at everyone below.

"Everyone. Today, I have something important to announce." The smile on Clayde's face was radiant, and he spoke in a bright voice. The major ministers who had received the news in advance all knew what King Clayde was going to say. Clayde glanced at an attendant by his side. Instantly, the attendant shouted in a loud voice, "Linley Baruch, enter the palace!"

His voice echoed in the palace. Shortly afterwards, Linley, dressed in black and gold magus robes, entered the palace. All of the nobles and ministers in the palace turned to look at him.

"I pay my respects to his Majesty." Linley bowed as he spoke.

Clayde looked at Linley, and a smile appeared on his face like a flower blooming. "Linley, for you to be willing to labor on behalf of our kingdom is something I am extremely gratified about. I now confer upon you the title of Prime Court Magus, and also bequeath upon you the rank of Marquis."

"Does anyone have an objection?" Clayde swept the court with his gaze.

All the nobles and ministers stared enviously at Linley, but none of them voiced any objections.

"Your Servant thanks you, Majesty!"

Actually, per what Cardinal Guillermo of the Radiant Church had originally said, the Radiant Church could let Linley instantly become a Duke. But Linley had felt this would be too amazing and draw too much attention to himself, especially given that he previously never had a rank of nobility. If he rose in rank too fast, that wouldn't necessarily be a good thing.

That's why they decided to go a step lower and confer the rank of Marquis.

"Linley, as the Prime Court Magus and as a Marquis, naturally you can no longer reside as a mere guest of the Dawson Conglomerate. I have already arranged for an extremely peaceful, secluded estate to be granted to you. It is on the Greenleaf Road, not too far from the palace." Clayde said with a smile to Linley.

Linley immediately once more thanked the king for his generosity.

In reality, Clayde had already discussed the question of conferring rank and land to Linley with Linley. Today, they were simply openly announcing it in court.

Upon leaving the palace, Linley engaged in some idle conversation with the other ministers.

The highest level of power in the Kingdom of Fenlai was mostly occupied by the Minister of War, the Left Premier, the Right Premier, the Inspector General, and other people on the similar plane. These people virtually governed the entirety of affairs in the Kingdom of Fenlai.

Most of these people had the rank of Marquis. Even the lowest ranked amongst them, the Inspector General, was a Marquis.

On Greenleaf Road.

Linley was seated within his carriage, closing his eyes while quietly training.

"Lord Linley, we're here." The servant's voice rang out from outside the carriage.

Linley opened his eyes, then pushed the curtain to his carriage open. Bebe directly leapt from the carriage seat onto Linley's shoulders.

"Wow, what a big estate!" Bebe's eyes were gleaming as he stared at the mansion.

Linley was also carefully inspecting the estate which the ruler of Fenlai had gifted him. This estate took up a vast expanse of land, and the main gate alone was over ten meters wide. Through the open gate, Linley could see there were many male servants, female servants, and also many Knights of the Radiant Temple.

"Not bad." Linley nodded as he entered.

"Milord." Seeing the gatekeeper bow respectfully, instantly all of the male and female servants in the courtyard suddenly stopped whatever it was they were doing and bowed respectfully towards Linley.

It was important for them to give Linley a good first impression. These servants all knew how incredible their new master was.

"Master Linley, congratulations, congratulations!" Suddenly, a very familiar voice rang out from not far away.

Linley turned his head. "Mr. Bernard."

The person who had come was the leader of the Debs clan, Bernard Debs. Bernard smiled at Linley. "Master Linley, what a coincidence. My clan's manor is also on Greenleaf Road. We're only one house over. In the future, it will be quite easy for us to visit each other."

“Oh.” Thinking back to when he had first rescued Alice and delivered her and Kalan back to Fenlai City, it did seem as though Kalan’s manor was not too far away.

“But Master Linley, your manor is much larger than mine. This manor of yours used to be where his Majesty himself lived.” Bernard said admiringly.

Linley also felt that this manor was astonishingly large, much larger than his ancestral mansion. To have such an enormous estate in Fenlai City, where each inch of land was as valuable as an inch of gold, was not something which simply having money could accomplish. So it turned out this was the former residence of his Majesty, King Clayde. No wonder it was so large.

“Mr. Bernard, I have to head back now. In the future, we’ll be able to chat quite often.” Linley smiled modestly, then turned his head and walked towards his own manor.

Right at this moment, at the gate to the Debs clan’s manor, Kalan, Rowling, and Alice were standing and watching from afar.

Chapter 6

In terms of both furnishings and layout, this estate was definitely first rate.

Linley was particularly fond of the Hot Springs Garden.

The Hot Springs Garden within the estate was the place where his Majesty would engage in training when he lived here. Clayde was a warrior of the ninth rank. In order to become such a mighty warrior, naturally he didn’t rely solely on his personal ability. He also spent years of painstaking effort.

The right half of the Hot Springs Garden was covered of a large, grassy area, filled with all sorts of exercise equipment.

On the left side of the Hot Springs Garden, next to a man-made hill, was a hot springs pool. The hot springs within this pool came naturally from underground. After a day of wild training, spending some time relaxing in the hot springs pool definitely was a godly, wonderful feeling.

Linley was currently bathing nude within the pool. The bubbling hot water rushed against his skin, making Linley feel so comfortable that his eyes began to close.

“Boss, when are we going to kill that Patterson guy? Last night, during the dinner, I really wanted to kill him for you already.” Bebe hopped out of the pool, all the fur on his body wet.

“Don’t be impatient.”

Exiting the hot springs, Linley changed into a clean set of training clothes, then walked over to the grassy area while beginning to mumble the words to a spell. After a few moments, an earthen glow began to cover the ground beneath Linley in a certain area as earth elemental essence began to swirl about him.

Earth-style magic – Supergravity Field.

Linley immediately leapt into the air, then inverted himself, head pointed down, feet pointing up. Using his two hands, he kept himself upright. Next, he moved to holding himself up with just one finger on each hand. Relying on just one finger, under the pressure of the Supergravity Field, Linley began to push himself up and down.

“One. Two...”

Linley counted silently. Each time he reached a thousand, Linley would change to a different finger.

The most important thing for a fighter was the quality of his body. Only a strong body would be able to accommodate a high amount of battle-qi. Only through this method would he be able to quickly grow strong! Even though he was now a Dragonblood Warrior, he still needed to maintain his daily training regime.

“Hrm?”

After training for about half an hour, Linley returned to the normal upright position. Linley stared coldly at the attractive female attendant who had just entered the Hot Springs Garden, carrying a tray with tea and fruit on top of it.

“My...my lord, this is your tea and fruit.” The female attendant was made somewhat uneasy by Linley’s stare, and she stammered a bit.

“Who instructed you to come in?” Linley said coldly.

The female attendant started. Stammering, she said, “Milord, I...I was worried that you were thirsty.”

“Thirsty?” Linley glanced at her expressionlessly.

"Attend to me!" Linley shouted.

Instantly, four burly warriors rushed in from outside the Hot Springs Garden. These four warriors all belonged to the Radiant Church. After all, the Radiant Church had dispatched over a hundred knights to safeguard Linley.

"Mercy, milord!" The attendant was so scared, she fell to her knees.

In the Yulan continent, nobles had a much higher status than commoners, especially high ranking nobles, who could casually kill a commoner without repercussion. As for Linley, whom even the king of the Kingdom of Fenlai treated courteously, without question Linley was one of the highest ranking nobles in the Kingdom of Fenlai.

Linley glanced at the attendant. In a cold voice, he said, "Remember, in the future, when I am in the Hot Springs Garden, no one is permitted entry. Anyone who does enter will be punished with twenty strikes of the military rod."

"Twenty strikes of the rod?" The attendant's face turned pale.

Military rods were extremely heavy. Even most muscular warriors would not be able to move for ten days or half a month after receiving twenty strikes of a military rod. A physically weak female attendant might very well die from such a beating.

"Mercy, milord, mercy!" The female attendant hurriedly pled.

Linley continued, "Since this is your first time committing this offense, I sentence you to twenty lashes of a rattan whip. If you make this mistake again, I definitely will not be merciful."

"Thank you milord! Thank you milord!" The female attendant felt relieved.

In terms of pain, the strikes from a rattan whip might even be more painful than that of the military rod, but it would cause nothing more than a superficial wound. It wouldn't cause any harm to the bones or to the organs. It would hurt, but it wouldn't kill.

"Remove her." Linley ordered the four warriors.

"Yes, Lord Linley." Two of the warriors stepped forward, pulling the attendant away and frog-marching her out. As for the tea and the fruit on the tray, those were all left on the floor.

Linley turned and once more returned to the grassy area.

The Bloodviolet Godsword was one of Linley's secret weapons. Although whenever he trained with it, Linley usually made sure to keep it straight and hard, on occasion, Linley would also let it remain flexible and wield it in a bizarre, flowing manner. Linley had to make certain that this secret of the Bloodviolet Godsword was not discovered by anyone.

Naturally, he could not allow anyone to watch him train.

With his right hand, Linley stroked his waist. Instantly, with a cold, violet flash, an extremely thin, violet blade appeared in Linley's hands.

"Swish!"

From within the Hot Springs Garden, one ray of violet light after another began to appear, while Linley roved back and forth within the garden like a wandering dragon. Having totally merged the support of the wind-style Supersonic spell with his own power, not only was Linley's movement speed fast, it was also extremely agile.

Through the usage of the Secret Dragonblood Manual, Linley trained his body. When he was relaxed, he would engage in the carving of sculptures to raise his spiritual energy, while he would enter the meditative trance in the middle of the hot springs to refine his mageforce.

His training permeated his every daily activity.

Only, Linley still had not been able to find the best time to make his move against Patterson. After all, he had relatively few encounters with Patterson. If Linley went directly to Patterson's manor, or Patterson came to Linley's residence, once Linley killed Patterson, within perhaps just half a day, King Clayde would know what had happened.

No matter how great Linley's potential was, if he murdered King Clayde's own brother, Clayde definitely would not be gentle with him.

Within the main hall, Linley was gracefully eating lunch.

After he finished his lunch, Linley once again began thinking about Patterson. "This Patterson fellow hasn't come to visit me at all. Seems like I'll have to personally pay a visit." Linley decided to no longer be the hunter setting a snare for the rabbit. He would head directly to the Patterson manor.

"Milord." Just at this moment, an attendant ran over from outside. "Milord, Lord Cardinal Guillermo of the Radiant Church has arrived."

“Guillermo?”

Linley’s body trembled, and then he immediately headed for the door, going out to personally welcome Guillermo.

Within the main hall.

“Linley, I hear that recently, your life has been leisurely and carefree. Every day, either you are training, resting in the hot springs, or engaging in stonesculpting. This sort of life really makes one envious of you.” Guillermo said with a laugh to Linley.

Linley nodded and laughed as well.

“But Linley.” Guillermo said solemnly, “I must remind you that although your sculptures are worth money, the thing which truly determines a person’s status is power! Just look at that nearby Debs clan. Don’t they have money? But in terms of status, they are inferior to you.”

Linley understood this rationale as well.

True, money was a useful thing.

But when one’s power reached a certain level, the uses of money would grow fewer and fewer. For example, to a Saint-level combatant, money was nothing more than a worldly possession. This was also why the Dawson Conglomerate had been willing to offer a hundred million gold coins to acquire Linley and have him join them.

To these trading unions, the support of a super-combatant was simply too vital.

“Lord Guillermo, I thank you for your reminder.” Linley said with a smile.

Linley didn’t say, of course, that it was stonesculpting that was the true reason behind him becoming a seventeen year old dual-element magus of the seventh rank.

“I’m just making small talk. After all, when you need to rest, you should.” Guillermo glanced at one of the Vicars behind him, who immediately opened the package he had been carrying on his back. After opening the silver-white package, a stone case was revealed within.

The Vicar then placed this stone case between Linley and Guillermo.

“Lord Guillermo, this is?” Linley already had an idea as to what this was.

Guillermo laughed with self-satisfaction. “Linley. Open it up yourself.”

Linley slowly opened the stone case, lifting up the lid. Within the stone case, there were two tomes made from silk thread. Both of these two tomes appeared to be colored a dark gold color.”

“This is?...” Linley looked towards Guillermo.

“Linley, didn’t I previously say that I was going to give to you books regarding magical incantations for wind-style and earth-style spells? That’s what these two tomes are.” Guillermo laughed.

Linley couldn’t help but feel excited.

Magical incantations and the proper method by which one cast the spell were both very important. Otherwise, even if one had enough spiritual energy and mageforce, one still wouldn’t be able to cast more powerful spells.

Linley immediately withdrew one of the two books and opened it up.

“Wind-style!” Upon reading the first page, Linley saw that the first page was a general summary regarding this tome.

After the summary, it began to describe one wind-style spell after another. This tome explained everything in great detail, and also clearly explained what to focus on for every single spell.

Linley flipped directly to the section on spells of the seventh rank.

Linley felt astonishment as he read about one powerful, intricately designed spell after another. Linley had to admit, the bygone people who had invented these spells in the past were, without a doubt, absolute geniuses.

“Spell of the ninth rank – Windshadow Technique. It was derived from a combination of the ‘Supersonic’ spell and the ‘Airwings’ spell. It possesses the special effects given by the Airwings spell, great speed, and great agility. It can be described as perfect...”

Seeing the deep, in-depth explanation of the Windshadow spell within this tome, Linley felt all the more excited.

A brand new world of magic was beginning to open up in front of him.

In the future, with his prowess in earth-style and wind-style magic, as well as the power of a Dragonblood Warrior, his future offensive potential would be enough to cause anyone to shudder in their heart.

Seeing how Linley had become totally absorbed with these magical tomes, Guillermo didn't make a sound as he quietly left by himself.

....

Within the Hot Springs Garden.

Linley was seated cross-legged on the grass, all of his muscles and bones quivering as that special Dragonblood battle-qi was permeating every part of his body with its force, causing Linley's entire body to experience a constant strengthening.

"Boss, Patterson will be arriving tonight. You still are in the mood to train?" Bebe mumbled, lying next to Linley.

Linley opened his eyes and looked at Bebe.

"In the mood?"

Linley felt bitter in his heart. Early this morning, that Duke Patterson had sent word via messenger that tonight, he wanted to come have a one-on-one visit with Linley. As the Minister of Finance, naturally Duke Patterson felt the need to have good relations with all the other important nobles. These past few days, he had been handling and worrying over the issue of illegally mining and smuggling water jade, which was why he hadn't had the time to visit Linley yet.

"I'm not in the mood, no, but I must train. Only when I have enough strength will I have confidence." Linley said to himself.

Per his current plans.

Within the next half year, he would kill Patterson as well as find out who the person behind Patterson was.

After finding out who the person behind Patterson was, Linley would, before the next anniversary of his father's death, find out what happened to his mother, or kill the person behind Patterson.

"Swish! Swish!"

"Ahhhh!" Outside the Hot Springs Garden, a miserable scream.

With a leap, Linley jumped atop the man-made hill within the Hot Springs Garden. Standing on the top of the hill, he could clearly see that the bodies of those ten or so Knights of the Radiant Church had begun to decay. They screamed in agony nonstop as their blood began to stain the ground.

At the same time, from every direction, a dense black fog began to billow at high speed towards the Hot Springs Garden. Wherever this black fog passed, everything, be it animal or human, would begin to corrode, then die.

Linley looked up into the sky.

The sky above him, as well, was now covered with that dense black fog. The surrounding black fog swept towards him at high speed.

“Someone’s here.”

Linley could sense that within that dense black fog, there were several black blurs that were charging towards him at high speed.

At this moment, there was nowhere for Linley to flee!

“Haaaargh!”

At a high speed, Linley descended from the man-made and, as though he were a fish, jumped into the hot springs pool.

Chapter 7

The hot springs water bubbled about. By now, Linley was at the bottom of the hot springs.

This hot springs pool wasn’t very deep, at most around two meters or so. Right now, Linley was pressing his body against the bottom of the pool. The water of the springs was very clear, and Linley could vaguely see what was going on outside.

“Who are these people? Why were the warriors of the Radiant Church outside unable to take a single blow from them?” Linley’s mind was full of suspicions. No matter what, at the very least the warriors of the Radiant Church outside were of the fifth rank. Every one of them possessed the ability to use battle-qi.

Could it be that for some reason, these warriors were not able to use battle-qi to block that black fog?

Linley didn’t understand what was going on, so for now, he did not dare to come out and directly resist the black fog!

“Linley, that black fog should be a fairly common darkness-style spell known as the ‘Corrosive Fog’. You can definitely use battle-qi to resist its effects.” Doehring Cowart’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind.

“But those warriors of the Radiant Church...”

“They should have been attacked by a different sort of spell that bewilders the mind, preventing them from utilizing their battle-qi in time to defend against the spell.” This was Doehring Cowart’s deduction.

“Gurgle, gurgle.”

From around Linley’s body, a gust of wind began to billow outwards. It was the wind-style spell, Windscout. Linley could totally sense everything which was going on outside.

“Quick, no matter what the cost, we have to kill Linley.” The leader in black said coldly.

The other five black robed men all nodded, charging towards the hot springs at high speed.

Right at this moment...

“Swish!”

Like an arrow, Linley shot out of the pool into the air, splattering beads of water everywhere. And then, Linley descended from above them like a fierce tiger leaping down from the mountains, his five fingers formed into claws as he ripped towards the head of one of the black robed men.

“Hmph.” That black-robed man’s body quivered slightly, as he prepared to use his left arm to forcibly block Linley’s claw attack, while stabbing out with the sharp knife in his right hand.

A hint of a vicious smile appeared on Linley’s face.

Suddenly, a bluish-black Dragonblood battle-qi covered the right arm of Linley, which was attacking with a claw hand. The layer of Dragonblood battle-qi was very thin. Given its thinness and the fact that the surrounding area was full of the dark ‘Corrosive Fog’, it wasn’t very visible at all. Most importantly...sharp claws suddenly appeared from where Linley’s fingernails had been.

“Shiiiiirk!” Linley’s right hand easily pierced through the black-robed man’s shoulder blade. At the same time, Linley once again used force on his right hand, giving it a fierce twist.

“Crack!”

The entire left chest of the black-robed man exploded, casting fresh blood everywhere. The black-robed man instantly died, but right before his death, he stared in disbelief, because his knife had stabbed Linley’s body but didn’t leave a mark at all.

“A seventh rank Earthguard armor is made out of jadestone. Do you think jadestone is so easily overcome?” Linley said to himself. “Much less, aside from the layer of jadestone armor, the skin on my body can instantly transform into the Dragonblood Warrior’s scales.”

Right now, when under the full Dragonblood Warrior state, Linley had the power of a warrior of the early eighth rank.

And when using the ‘Dragonform’, Linley had inherited the hallmark property of the Armored Razorback Wyrms; incredible defensive powers. Linley’s black scales were much stronger than the jadestone armor. Judging from the power of that stab by the black-robed man, he had most likely been an expert of the seventh rank.

Unfortunately, the defensive abilities of that expert of the seventh rank were totally unable to defend against this claw attack by Linley. Those were the draconic claws of a transformed Dragonblood Warrior. And what’s more, this was only the Demidragon state.

“How is that possible?” The other four black-robed men were stunned.

Based on their information, Linley was a dual-element magus of the seventh rank, and his warrior abilities were far weaker. They didn’t expect that an assassin of the seventh rank couldn’t withstand a single blow from him.

“Our intelligence was wrong!” The leader of the black-robed men standing in the very back cursed in his heart.

But Linley only nodded mentally to himself. “It seems that when using a partial transformation, one can catch the opponent off-guard and make them suffer a serious loss.”

“You Cult of Shadows bastards!” Furious roars could be heard ringing out from outside, travelling at high speed towards the Hot Springs Garden. Linley understood

that another group of the Knights of the Radiant Church charged with his protection had arrived. Only ten or so people had been killed just now, while his total guard numbered over a hundred.

The expression on the face of the leader of the black-robed men changed.

“No matter the cost, kill Linley!” The black-robed leader shouted.

And then he led the four remaining black-robed men to surround and attack Linley. The black knives in their hands gleamed with a dark aura, as they seemed to have infused every last bit of their power into the knives in their hands.

An attack which they were willing to give up their own lives to make!

“Warriors of the seventh rank, right?”

Seeing the group attack of these black-robed men, Linley didn’t dodge or hide at all. With his right hand, Linley gently touched his waist. Suddenly....

A cold, fierce, brilliant violet light flashed.

At the same time, Linley retreated at high speed towards the back. Of the five people attacking Linley, four remained at their original spots, while the fifth, the leader, hurriedly retreated at high speed.

“Shirrrrrrrrrrk!”

The stomachs of those four black-robed men were sliced open. Their stomach and intestines fell to the ground, and blood sprayed everywhere.

“Fast. And sharp.” The leader of the black-robed men stared in astonishment at Linley.

A single sword stroke killing four warriors of the seventh rank. This example was really too terrifying.

Linley knew very well how sharp this Bloodviolet Godsword was, but just based on Bloodviolet’s natural sharpness alone, it might be difficult to penetrate the defense of a magical beast of the seventh rank. Similarly, if a warrior of the seventh rank was to use battle-qi to protect his body, at the very most, Linley would only be able to heavily injure them, not kill them.

But just then, those four black-robed men had been using all of the energy on their attacks!

They didn't expect Linley to have such a sword on him.

"If I want to enhance the power of Bloodviolet, I would have to activate it via my Dragonblood battle-qi. But if I use the Dragonblood battle-qi, the speed of Bloodviolet will be slower than if I used my wind-style mageforce to activate it." At this moment, Linley was pondering the pros and cons of each.

Just then, it was true that Linley had used a single strike to kill the four of them.

What he relied on was his astonishing speed, an attack so fast that his opponents weren't able to respond to it!

But just relying on speed and the sharpness of his sword would generally only be enough to kill a warrior of the sixth rank, or to heavily wound a warrior of the seventh rank. Only if the warrior of the seventh rank were to act like these four assassins and concentrate all of their battle-qi on their attack, not caring about their lives and sparing nothing for defense, would he be able to kill them.

"But the leader didn't suffer much of an injury." Linley looked at the leader of the black-robed men.

This black-robed man's power should most likely have exceeded the seventh rank.

Using wind-style mageforce on Bloodviolet could make Bloodviolet move faster and make its movements more smooth. But it couldn't raise the attacking power! But if he were to use Dragonblood battle-qi on Bloodviolet, he could increase the attack power but wouldn't be able to increase his attack speed.

"You pieces of trash!"

Angry roars erupted from right outside the Hot Springs Garden. Clearly, these Knights of the Radiant Church had just seen the corpses of their companions and were all furious now.

"Linley, you are even more formidable than we thought you were. But unfortunately, you have sided with the Radiant Church. Thus..." The black-robed leader seemed to pay no attention at all to those who were outside, as he spoke in a soft voice to Linley.

The black-robed leader's voice seemed to carry a certain unique timbre to it. At first, Linley didn't notice anything, but by the time the black-robed man was halfway through his words, Linley could feel his mind grow a bit blurry and his focus waver.

"You must die!"

The black knife of the black-robed man arrived almost instantly at Linley's chest.

"Linley!" Doehring Cowart's mental roar echoed in Linley's mind, instantly bringing Linley back to his senses.

"Crunch!"

The black-robed leader stared at his waist in astonishment. His waist had suddenly been bitten almost in half. His exposed muscles were still trembling, and blood was pouring out in a torrent. The black-robed man could clearly feel that his entire body had lost all strength. His life-force was quickly draining away.

"This Shadowmouse..."

The black-robed leader stared stupidly at the black Shadowmouse by Linley's side.

A black Shadowmouse should at most be a magical beast of the third or fourth ranks. To this black-robed leader, as a warrior of the eighth rank, a black Shadowmouse shouldn't be able to injure him at all. This was why the black-robed leader hadn't paid any attention to it.

But...

Just then, that little black Shadowmouse had flown over, quickly transformed his jaws into a larger size, then taken a vicious, giant bite out of his waist.

"Hmph! Let's see you be cocky now. You should consider it an honor to have died by the hands of I, Bebe." Bebe stood near the corpse of the black-robed leader, his little head raised proudly.

Linley couldn't help but laugh.

Bebe was a freak of nature that could even withstand the dying final blow of an Armored Razorback Wyrn. Bebe was capable of even biting and breaking the tough, massive plated scales of a Velocidragon of the eighth rank! In terms of both offense and defense, Bebe was now extremely powerful.

The only weakness was...his size was too small.

Even if Bebe was able to bite those giant magical beasts, Bebe might not be able to totally chew through their thick massive scales or skin at one bite.

"Bastard!"

Those angrily howling Knights of the Radiant Church charged to Linley's side. Just as they prepared to do battle with their opponents...they saw the ground littered with corpses.

"Milord, are you alright?" The leader of the knights immediately asked.

Right now, Linley's appearance was very frightening. Both his face and his body were covered with blood.

"I'm fine. I only suffered some light wounds." Linley said. "You dispose of the corpses. I'll go take a rest." As he spoke, Linley immediately walked out of the Hot Springs Garden. And now, when the knights lowered their head to stare at the corpses, they couldn't help but begin to frown.

The corpse of the black-robed leader was missing half of his waist, as though it had been bitten off, or perhaps cut off by claws.

The other four black-robed assassins had been cut cleanly in half, while for the last one, it seemed as though his left chest had entirely exploded, revealing his bones.

"What...how..."

The group of knights stared dumbly, their jaws slack. They didn't imagine that Linley, a magus, could cause his enemies to die like this.

.....

At the top level of the Radiant Temple.

The long, skinny form of the Holy Emperor was covered by a long, whitish-silver robe. He reclined on a chair, leisurely flipping through some books. His bald head shone dazzlingly like the sun.

"Holy Emperor." The red-robed Guillermo bowed obediently in front of him.

"Hrm?" The Holy Emperor twitched his eyelids, glancing at Guillermo.

Being watched by the Holy Emperor was like being under pressure from a thirty thousand pound boulder. Guillermo respectfully said, "Holy Emperor, just now, the Cult of Shadows made an assassination attempt against Linley. But fortunately, Linley's abilities as a warrior are quite profound. He managed to kill all of the attackers, suffering only a light wound."

"Killed them?"

The Holy Emperor looked at Guillermo with his jade-blue eyes. With a light laugh, he said, "Guillermo, the Cult of Shadows is aware that Linley is a dual-element magus of the seventh rank. Could it be that they didn't send a sufficiently competent force?"

"Holy Emperor, this group of assassins was quite powerful. The lead assassin should also have been a specialist at using mind-bewitching darkness-style magic." Guillermo hurriedly said.

The Holy Emperor didn't say anything else, only faintly smiled as he looked at Guillermo.

"Guillermo, are you proposing....?"

Guillermo nodded. "Right. Linley is an important individual who needs to be trained well by the Radiant Church. More importantly, not only does Linley possess high natural talent, he is also an extremely hard worker. I believe that after another fifty years, it is very likely that Linley will become a Saint-level combatant. And in a hundred years....Linley will be one of the ranked Saint-level combatants of the Yulan continent."

If a man did not prepare for the future, his present would be filled with problems.

Both the Radiant Church and the Cult of Shadows had existed for many years now. Even back when the Yulan Empire had unified the Yulan continent, they had existed.

The reason they were able to last for so long, was because they both understood the importance of one thing: Cultivating talent!

Constantly expanding, constantly converting believers, constantly cultivating talent.

Perhaps right now, Linley wasn't too powerful, but a century later? Perhaps he would be an individual approaching the level of the Holy Emperor. To a Saint-level combatant, a hundred years was nothing at all.

"That's why I wish for Linley to receive even better instruction, as well as better protection. In other words...I wish for Linley to go train alongside Lord 'Fallen Leaf'." Guillermo said.

"Fallen Leaf?"

The Holy Emperor was startled, but then he nodded. "Fine, then. But first, you must go seek his approval. I certainly am not able to make a decision on behalf of Fallen Leaf."

“Yes, Holy Emperor.”

Guillermo paid his respects and left.

The Holy Emperor glanced at the departing Guillermo with his jade-blue eyes, and then stared at the sky outside the window. “He killed all of the attackers? Baruch...Baruch...hrm. It seems as though the Baruch clan was one of the clans of the Four Supreme Warriors. The Dragonblood Warrior clan.”

Chapter 8

During the recent assassination attempt, Linley’s side suffered the losses of eighteen Knights of the Radiant Church, four female attendants, and two male attendants. As a result of this, the Radiant Church further strengthened and enlarged the security detail within the estate.

That same night of the assassination, within the manor.

“Linley, are you okay?” King Clayde asked solicitously.

“I’m only slightly wounded, your Majesty.” Linley’s arm was wrapped with medical gauze.

Actually, Linley hadn’t been injured at all during this attack, but he didn’t want others to know exactly how powerful he was. Thus, he lightly injured himself on purpose, using his straight chisel to cut himself on his arm.

To Linley, who had previously suffered the pain of the initial Dragonform transformation, this sort of pain was nothing.

“As long as you are fine, Linley.” Duke Patterson, who was by King Clayde’s side, laughed.

Linley looked at Duke Patterson.

Tonight should have been the night for the meeting between Linley and Duke Patterson, but because of the assassination attempt, the two of them no longer would have the chance to have a private conversation tonight.

“Second brother, it’s best that we don’t disturb Linley any further. Let’s allow him to have a good rest.” Clayde turned his head and said.

"Yes, your Majesty." Patterson glanced at Linley, and then followed King Clayde out.

Linley felt as though there were a hint of helplessness in the look Patterson had given him. Clearly, per Patterson's original plan, there were some things he wished to discuss with Linley in private during their scheduled one-on-one meeting.

But clearly, this was no longer an appropriate time.

In the next few days, the estate once more returned to normal.

"Boss, today is May 18th, right?" Bebe, who was enjoying lunch alongside Linley, suddenly spoke mentally to Linley.

"Right. What is it?" Linley looked at Bebe.

Bebe wrinkled his little nose. Quirking his mouth, he mentally said, "Boss, have you forgotten? That Bernard fellow, the leader of the Debs clan, told us that June 18th would be the date of his son's engagement ceremony. He invited you to attend as well. It's now May 18th. You only have a month left."

"Engagement?"

Linley was startled.

A month from now, Alice and Kalan would be getting engaged.

"That's none of my business." Linley quickly returned to his usual calm demeanor, lowering his head and continuing to eat.

Bebe's beady little eyes rolled around three times, and then he used his tiny little paws to rub at his chin. A look of suspicion on his face, he said, "Could it be that I, Bebe, am mistaken? Shouldn't be the case. I'm so awesome, after all. My judgment is excellent. In his heart, the Boss certainly cares about this affair. If it were me, Bebe, I would smash that little Kalan's skull in with a single paw."

"Lord Linley."

One of the guardian knights entered the main hall. "Lord Linley. Cardinal Guillermo has come."

"Guillermo?" Linley hesitated for just one moment, then he immediately put down his utensils and went to the door.

In the entire hierarchy of the Radiant Church, the person whom Linley was most familiar with and had the best relationship with was probably Cardinal Guillermo.

When someone treated Linley as courteously as Guillermo did, Linley naturally wouldn't act in a high, arrogant manner, as though he thought himself better.

"Linley, there's something I must tell you." Upon seeing Linley, Guillermo began to chuckle with joy as he spoke.

Linley looked at Guillermo questioningly. "What is it?"

Beaming, Guillermo said, "Linley, are you aware that within our Radiant Church, we have a special group of people known as...Ascetics?"

"Yes, I am." Linley nodded.

Previously, when he had been kidnapped by those experts from the Cult of Shadows, it was the Deputy Arbiter of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal as well as an Ascetic and several Executors who had scared the opponents away. Only then had he been able to return to the city of Fenlai.

"Within our Radiant Church, there have been many people obsessed with magic or fighting skills who have enlisted within the ranks of the Ascetics. Put another way, neither the Knights of the Radiant Temple, nor the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, have as many experts amongst their ranks as the Ascetics do."

Guillermo beamed as he patted Linley on the shoulders. "What I am about to tell you is that you have the chance to become the disciple of a legendary Ascetic."

"A legendary Ascetic?" Linley frowned.

Guillermo smiled faintly. "This legendary Ascetic is considered to be at the highest levels, even amongst the Ascetics. He also possesses an extremely high status within our Radiant Church. As for his power, even if we look at the Yulan continent as a whole, there are perhaps only those three freaks of nature who can surpass him in power."

"Three freaks of nature?" Linley instantly grew curious. "Lord Guillermo, who are these three freaks of nature that you speak of?"

While chatting, the two of them walked back to the main hall.

Guillermo didn't reply right away. He glanced at the Vicar next to him, and the Vicar instantly escorted everyone present away, then obediently stepped out himself, closing the door.

In the entire main hall, only Linley, Guillermo, and Bebe were now present.

“Linley, in the future, it’s possible that you will meet with these people, so it isn’t a big deal if I tell you about them now.” Guillermo said, putting on a mysterious air.

Linley looked at Guillermo curiously.

Guillermo sighed. “Here in the Yulan continent, there are three individuals who have surpassed the existence of the Saint-level combatants. The three ‘freaks of nature’ I talked about, are precisely those three freaks.”

“Those who ascended past the level of Saints? That would make them Gods?” Linley was shocked.

“Right. You can refer to them as Gods.” Guillermo nodded.

Linley immediately perked up his ears to listen closely.

Guillermo slowly said, “Across the entirety of the Yulan continent, there are only three such freaks. The first freak is the ‘High Priest of the Living Temple’ of the Yulan Empire. Many people simply refer to him as the ‘High Priest’. I, at least, have no idea how old the High Priest is. He has been alive for simply too long.”

Linley nodded.

“This second freak has been alive an extremely long time. He is the true ruler of the third most dangerous place in the Yulan continent, the Forest of Darkness. This freak is supposedly a magical beast in nature, but he has already reached the level of being able to transform into a human. Linley, you should already know that when a magical beast reaches the Saint-level, he can transform his body enough to speak in human tongues, but is not able to transform into a human form. You can imagine for yourself how terrifying a magical beast who can transform into a human must be.”

Linley nodded slightly.

He had previously heard Doehring Cowart speak of these two individuals. Even back when Doehring Cowart was alive, these two had been invincible presences.

“And the third person?” Linley asked.

Guillermo sighed. “This third person is also someone who I revere greatly. He was the founding Emperor of the O’Brien Empire, the most militarily powerful empire in the Yulan continent. People call him the ‘War God O’Brien’.”

“O’Brien?” Linley memorized this name.

Given that the O'Brien Empire was named after this person, one could imagine how amazing he was.

"Five thousand years ago, the War God quickly rose to prominence, defeating one Saint-level combatant after another. In that era, there were many super-combatants, such as the Four Supreme Warriors, who appeared during that time period." Guillermo smiled at Linley.

Linley thought back to his own ancestor, Baruch.

The first leader of the Baruch clan had appeared almost exactly five thousand years ago as well.

"Back then, the Four Supreme Warriors were extremely powerful, but their brilliance was totally eclipsed by the War God. The War God defeated one powerful Saint-level combatant after another, and in the end, even engaged in a great battle with the High Priest, in the air above the Yulan River. During the course of their battle, the shockwaves alone killed over ten thousand people. In the end, both the O'Brien Empire and the Yulan Empire gave up a large amount of territory, allowing it to form into three independent kingdoms which served as buffer zones between these two great Empires." Guillermo sighed emotionally.

"Linley, in the minds of many, the High Priest is the most powerful human alive. But the War God was actually able to fight to a stalemate with the High Priest. But how few years had the War God been alive for? This is why so many people are in awe of him. Who knows what level of power the War God is now at, after five thousand years of training." Guillermo sighed with praise.

Linley secretly nodded as well.

"This War God. He fought the High Priest to a stalemate?" Doehring Cowart's voice rang out in Linley's mind. "How is that possible?"

Back in Doehring Cowart's era, the High Priest's brilliance eclipsed everyone in the world.

In Doehring Cowart's heart, the High Priest was invincible and undefeatable.

"Grandpa Doehring, every era will see super-combatants emerge. If you, Grandpa Doehring, hadn't died back then and had continued to train, perhaps one day you would've also broken past the Saint-level and become an expert on the same level as the High Priest." Linley mentally said.

Doehring Cowart let out a low sigh and no longer spoke.

“Enough talk about those three freaks. The person I am about to have you meet is only inferior to those three. If you can become his disciple, it will be of great benefit to you as you attempt to increase your power in magic.” Guillermo said.

Linley laughed inside.

As far as someone who was only inferior to those three freaks...wasn't his own Grandpa Doehring someone who was at the peak of the Saint-level?

“What is the name of this Ascetic?” Linley asked.

“His name is...Fallen Leaf.”

Within one of the slums of Fenlai City. Only now did Linley realize that within Fenlai City, one of the largest, most prosperous cities in the Yulan continent, there was such an impoverished, desolate place. It was far worse off than even his own hometown of Wushan township.

At this moment, Linley and Guillermo were walking shoulder-to-shoulder within a foul, dirty alley.

“Lord Guillermo, the Lord Fallen Leaf that you spoke of lives here?” Linley couldn't believe it.

“Right.” Guillermo nodded. “Linley, remember, this Lord Fallen Leaf detests those nobles who think themselves better than others. Thus, you must be modest and courteous, even towards these poor people.”

Linley glanced at the poor people lining the streets.

Not too far away, he saw a seven or eight year old child, malnourished to the point of being skin and bones, who wore a foul, oily black rag as his clothes. This child was staring at Linley with fear in his eyes.

Due to his skinniness, his sunken eyes seemed particularly large.

Those innocent eyes made Linley's heart tremble.

Linley didn't do anything, just continued to walk forward alongside Guillermo. On the road, Linley saw one poor child after another. None of them wore any proper clothes, and all of them were extremely poor.

“Here we are.” Guillermo suddenly said.

Linley couldn't help but turn his head to look.

They were standing in front of a casually erected metal frame-like dwelling. An old man who looked like a beggar sat in the middle of the building. The old man was so skinny that it made one's heart quiver, and all the skin on his body was sagging down. His hands were like the claws of a chicken, only skin and bone.

This old fellow was looking at Linley with curiosity.

"Lord Fallen Leaf." Guillermo said respectfully.

"He really is Lord Fallen Leaf?" Linley wasn't sure in his heart, but seeing Guillermo behave in such a manner, he was forced to believe it.

But could this old man in front of him, who looked like a beggar that could be blown down by a good gust of wind, really be the high Saint-level combatant, Lord 'Fallen Leaf'?

"Guillermo, this is the one you mentioned to me, the so-called kid with talent?" The old beggar asked.

"Yes, Lord Fallen Leaf." Guillermo said respectfully.

"Grandpa Fallen Leaf, Grandpa Fallen Leaf, quick, help save my mother. She was beaten and injured by someone!" A youthful voice rang out, then a girl came running in, carrying her skinny mother on her back.

The old beggar immediately turned around and stretched his right hand out.

Surrounded by a holy light, that heavily wounded woman began to heal at an astonishing speed.

The old beggar turned back to look at Linley. "I will only teach those with kind hearts and pure souls. But you...your heart is filled with an excessive desire to kill. I will not teach you."

Guillermo couldn't help but be astonished by these words.

"An excessive desire to kill?" A hint of a smile appeared on Linley's face.

The need to seek vengeance on behalf of his parents had caused unspeakable pain and torment to Linley. Every minute, he desired to kill Patterson, but he continued to force himself to be calm and to not be rash. But this sort of constant self-repression did indeed cause Linley's killing urge to only grow greater and greater.

"Then, Lord Fallen Leaf, I take my leave." Linley bowed slightly, then turned and left.

The old beggar had originally wanted to say a few extra words. Upon seeing Linley turn and leave so cleanly and bluntly, he couldn't help but be startled. But then, a hint of a smile appeared on his face.

Chapter 9

"Lord Fallen Leaf." Seeing how impolite Linley had been, Guillermo hurriedly apologized, "Lord Fallen Leaf, this Linley is only seventeen years old this year. Lord Fallen Leaf, please forgive his discourtesy."

Guillermo knew very well what a great amount of influence this Fallen Leaf had within the Radiant Church. This Lord Fallen Leaf could be considered the spiritual leader of the entire Ascetic branch. Even the Holy Emperor himself didn't have the ability to force him to go against his own will.

Using his skinny, chicken-claw like right hand, Fallen Leaf stroked his straggly beard. With curiosity, he watched Linley's departing back. "Discourtesy? No, no. He wasn't exactly discourteous. It can only be said that this kid acts very firmly and unwaveringly."

Guillermo was startled.

He didn't expect that this Lord Fallen Leaf, who initially had a poor impression of Linley, would now praise him.

"Guillermo." Fallen Leaf looked at Guillermo.

"Lord Fallen Leaf, I await your instructions." Guillermo said respectfully.

Smiling, Fallen Leaf said, "This Linley's heart is filled with murderous intent, and he is firm and unwavering. I think a person like him will never hesitate in his actions, whether it be in killing or in anything else. A person like this is very much suited to be the sharp sword of the Radiant Church."

Guillermo understood what Fallen Leaf meant.

Although the Radiant Church urged people to follow their better natures, towards the followers of other religions, the Radiant Church was ruthless and merciless. Naturally, this would require ruthless and merciless people. This was why the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Church was originally formed.

“Perhaps in the future, this kid, Linley, will become the new Praetor of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal.” Fallen Leaf said softly.

Guillermo couldn't help but turn to look at Linley's departing back.

Become the Praetor of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal?

Guillermo knew very well that the Praetor of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal could be considered the second highest ranking person within the Radiant Church. In fact, from some standpoints, it could be considered that the position of the Praetor of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal was on par with that of the Holy Emperor.

The Holy Emperor was, on the surface, the leader of the Radiant Church who wielded the most power.

But the Praetor of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal was the dark underside of the Radiant Church, the leader of the most powerful military force within the Church!

“Lord Fallen Leaf, are you willing to guide him?” Guillermo suddenly asked.

But Fallen Leaf still shook his head.

“Why?” Guillermo was confused. Since Fallen Leaf appreciated Linley, why wasn't he willing to train him?

Fallen Leaf shook his head. “My training methods are not suited for him. My way requires a pure heart, and is suited for someone whose heart faces the light. But as for him...the path he walks is the path of slaughter.”

Guillermo nodded.

“Guillermo, there's no need for you to find another master for him. A truly powerful person will rely on himself to find a path most suitable for himself. The teachings of others are, after all, based on their own ways.”

Fallen Leaf looked at Guillermo. “You are an Arch Magus of the ninth rank. Why, then, have I never instructed you? It's precisely because of this reason. Even if I tell you about what I have comprehended and my insights, you still will not succeed, because only after countless personal experiences will your soul transform, allowing you to comprehend deeper levels of mysteries. Only then will you succeed.”

“Remember. Rely on yourself.” Fallen Leaf smiled.

Guillermo nodded.

He hadn't yet entered the Saint-level, so there was no way for him to comprehend what the difference between the Saint-level and the ninth rank was. Although at times, he wondered if Fallen Leaf was intentionally withholding valuable guidance from him, upon seeing Fallen Leaf's sincere gaze and hearing his sincere voice, he believed him.

"Perhaps I really do have to rely on myself."

Guillermo had been held at the ninth rank as a magus for a long time, now. He deeply desired to make a breakthrough.

After all, between the ninth rank and the Saint-level, the difference between the two was like that of the heavens and the earth.

Within Linley's manor. The Hot Springs Garden.

Next to the hot springs pool, Linley was quietly seated in the meditative trance.

"Shudder, shudder." Linley's entire body was constantly emitting strange noises, as his bones and muscles continuously shuddered. Beads of sweat constantly flowed down his body.

Training in accordance with the Secret Dragonblood Manual was ten times more effective than using ordinary battle-qi training methods.

But this was only natural. After all, the requirements for one to be able to use the Secret Dragonblood Manual were also extremely intense.

"Why is training for humans so difficult? You even require all sorts of secret manuals that require different body types." Lying next to Linley, Bebe's little head turned to look at Linley, his mind full of questions.

He was a magical beast, and his training was very simple. He would directly absorb darkness-style elemental essence from the outside world, drawing it into his body and into his magicite core.

There weren't any secrets. It was just a very natural absorption process.

.....

Linley continued to live this sort of quiet life, spending most of his time each day in training.

Using several high quality training methods at the same time, he pushed his body's capacity for punishment to the maximum.

In the blink of an eye, over ten days passed.

“Whoosh!”

Wielding the Bloodviolet Godsword in his hands, Linley tested out one attack after another.

Which angle allowed the sword to strike out the fastest?

How to control the vibrations of Bloodviolet to reduce the hindrance of the natural air friction, and to make his sword move faster?

Time and time again, he painstakingly trained in striking with his sword.

Each time Linley made his move, a brilliant violent flash would appear.

The speed of these blows was enough to make one’s heart quail.

But Linley was still not satisfied. He constantly pursued improvement, perfection. Using his understanding of wind elemental essence which was granted to him by his wind magic, he trained hard to make Bloodviolet move even quicker and more fluidly.

“Milord!” A voice called out from outside the Hot Springs Garden.

Linley paused. With a movement of his hand, the Bloodviolet Godsword in his hand disappeared. Nobody could notice that this Bloodviolet sword had wrapped around Linley’s waist now.

Even if a normal person paid attention to his belt, they would only think it to be a purple belt.

“Enter.” Only now did Linley speak.

Instantly, a beautiful maid came running in at high speed. A look of worship on her face, she looked at Linley, and then immediately lowered her head and said respectfully, “Milord, the Debs clan has sent someone over with an invitation card.” As she spoke, she offered the invitation card to Linley.

Linley looked at the invitation card.

The invitation card was red in color, while the trimmings were golden. The words ‘invitation card’ were written on top in bright, bold characters.

“Invitation card?”

Linley accepted the invitation card, and then opened it. Indeed, the contents of the card were exactly what he had thought it would be.

"On June 18th, Kalan, Rowling, and Alice will carry out their engagement ceremony. Who is this Rowling?" Staring at the invitation card, Linley frowned.

"You can leave now." Linley said calmly.

"Yes, milord." The attendant said respectfully, then she departed from the Hot Springs Garden.

"Boss, is that Debs clan arranging the engagement ceremony for Alice?" Bebe leapt onto Linley's shoulders, then stretched his little head out to peer at the card.

"Uh, Rowling? Who is Rowling?" Bebe looked at Linley suspiciously.

Doehring Cowart also appeared next to Linley. Seeing the invitation letter, a hint of a smile appeared on his face.

"Grandpa Doehring." Linley turned to look at Doehring Cowart.

"Are you wondering who Rowling is?" Doehring Cowart really was someone who had only gotten craftier with age. He instantly understood. "It's simple. Your sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', made many people familiar with Alice's appearance. Although they don't know who Alice is, once the engagement ceremony is publicized, many people will see Alice. By then, they will definitely recognize her as being the mold for your creation of 'Awakening From the Dream'. The love story contained within your sculpture is clearly visible to anyone who has ever analyzed stonesculpting. And precisely for this reason, the Debs clan definitely is not willing to allow Alice to become Kalan's principal wife. This Rowling is most likely going to be Kalan's principal wife."

Linley was stunned.

Alice. Wasn't going to be Kalan's principal wife?

In the Yulan continent, the principal wife held a high status in the household, while the secondary wives held a much lower status.

"Because of me?" Instantly, Linley's emotions grew complicated.

Because of his sculpture, Alice could no longer be Kalan's principal wife.

"Linley, do you intend to go to this engagement ceremony?" Doehring Cowart asked.

"Yes. Of course." Linley's eyes hardened, and then he laughed. "Bernard has invited me several times now. This time, he specially sent over an invitation card. How could I refuse?"

Linley stared up at the blue sky, where wisps of silk-like clouds were floating about.

Long ago, he had sat on the grass alongside Alice and stared up at this sort of blue sky.

June 18th.

According to the priests of the Radiant Church, this was an extremely propitious day. Thus, the Debs clan chose to hold the engagement ceremony on this day.

This day, the front of the Debs clan's manor was jam packed with carriages and people.

Major nobles, wealthy magnates, beautiful noblewomen, dazzling young noble ladies, handsome noble youths...today, it could be said that the Debs clan's manor had more nobles present than any other place in Fenlai City.

"Lord Marquis Linley has arrived!"

The voice of the receiver for the Debs clan shot up two octaves as Linley, dressed in a black gentleman's outfit, strode into the main hall of the Debs clan.

Virtually all of the nobles within the main hall stopped their conversations and turned to look at Linley.

Linley glanced around the room, a slight smile on his lips. Linley's demeanor was totally in keeping with the magnificent presence of the upper nobility.

"Lord Linley, welcome!"

Bernard, who was previously chatting with some other guests, quickly walked towards Linley's direction. Kalan, who was the leading role for this event, came by as well at Bernard's side.

"Mr. Bernard." Linley smiled. "Congratulations on your son's engagement, to two beautiful women, no less."

"Thank you, thank you." Bernard said warmly.

Kalan also said respectfully, "Lord Linley, welcome to our home. I hope you will enjoy yourself today."

Linley glanced at Kalan, but only nodded. Without speaking to him, Linley looked back at Bernard. "Lord Bernard, please feel free to take care of your other guests. I'll just find a place to stand."

...

The main hall of the Debs clan was extremely large. Hundreds of nobles and magnates were within it, but they didn't feel the slightest bit crowded. The rich noblewomen and the rich young noble ladies were all attired beautifully, strutting through the crowd like proud peacocks.

Especially after Linley arrived. Many of the rich young noble ladies 'unconsciously' drew closer to him.

"Lord Linley, you are so amazing. I've trained in stonesculpting for three years now, but I'm not even able to sculpt a basic shape yet." A young noble lady with a head of beautiful brown hair said warmly to Linley. "Lord Linley, you are really so incredible. You are only a bit older than us, but you've already approached the level of Proulx and Hope Jensen. Lord Linley, can you help teach me?"

This young noble lady looked hopefully at Linley with her big, beautiful eyes.

"Stonesculpting requires sufficient wrist strength. For such soft, beautiful ladies like yourself, it's actually better if you just learned how to paint." Linley said with a superficial smile.

As he spoke, Linley felt helpless.

Perhaps it was because all of these young noble ladies all knew that Linley was not yet married, but they all came to bother Linley, one after another.

And of course, the parents of these young noble ladies were more than happy to just sit and watch.

Because virtually all of the nobles within the Kingdom of Fenlai knew that if someone could become in-laws with Linley, their clan would rise in stature by leaps and bounds!

What sort of a figure was Linley?

He was already the Prime Court Magus, but virtually all of the nobles knew that he was only serving the Kingdom of Fenlai in name. In the future, he would definitely become an important figure within the Radiant Church. In the future, his position might be higher than that of even the ruler of Fenlai!

“Linley.” A bright voice rang out.

Linley turned around. “Your Majesty.”

The young noble ladies surrounding him all made their curtsies, no longer daring to entangle him. Only now did Linley secretly let out a breath as he headed towards Clayde. When he was alongside the king, at least those young noble ladies wouldn’t dare to bother him.

“Linley, see anyone you fancy?” Clayde whispered teasingly into Linley’s ears as Linley drew near.

Linley couldn’t help but cast a helpless glance at Clayde. “Your Majesty, there’s no need to tease me like this, is there?”

“Haha...” Clayde couldn’t help but break into a loud laugh.

Suddenly, the entire main hall fell silent. Clayde also turned his head to stare at the door to the main hall, his eyes shining. “Hey. There’s the leading females for tonight.”

Linley turned to look as well.

Kalan was holding a beautiful woman’s hand on each side. Both of these women were wearing beautiful full dresses, while the beautiful adornments in their golden hair shimmered brightly.

One was Rowling. The other was Alice.

“Alice.”

Linley’s gaze rested for a moment on Alice. Alice was more beautifully made up today than she had ever been before. But this time, the person holding her hand was Kalan.

“Oh, my goddess! Isn’t this the ‘goddess’ which Master Linley carved into ‘Awakening From the Dream’?” Suddenly, a noble let out a startled shout.

The main hall was instantly filled with clamorous discussion.

Aside from the few people who already knew what Alice looked like, the vast majority of the people present had no idea what Alice’s appearance was. But they had seen the sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’. Many of the people had even designated the woman within the ‘Awakening From the Dream’ as the goddess of their dreams.

But at this moment, their 'goddess of their dreams' suddenly appeared before them at this engagement ceremony.

Chapter 10

The main hall of the Debs clan was in an uproar.

"This...this..."

Many nobles were absolutely stunned upon seeing Alice. Linley's extremely high level of sculpting abilities, unfortunately, was to blame for them to so easily be able to recognize Alice as the inspiration for 'Awakening From the Dream'.

Linley had already surpassed the level of 'skill'; through his sculpture, he totally was able to bring out this woman's charm and mesmerizing qualities. All of these nobles, at the very first glance, were able to be absolutely certain that Alice was the 'goddess' of their dreams.

Many nobles looked at Alice, then turned to stare at Linley.

Silence!

All of a sudden, the entire main hall became deafeningly quiet, as though all of the nobles present suddenly understood something, while also understanding that now was not the time to discuss this.

But this silence...made Alice all the more embarrassed and frantic.

From the corner of her eyes, Alice glanced at Linley. Linley, who was standing right next to the King of Fenlai. Still as calm as ever. He was just quietly looking at her.

Towards Linley...

Alice's emotions towards him were very complex. There was regret. There was hatred. Hatred for the fact that Linley's sculpture had prevented her from being the principal wife, and also for making her feel so embarrassed now. But at the same time, that sculpture...had also let her truly understand how Linley had felt towards her.

Kalan felt extremely awkward as well.

"Everyone, let me make the introductions." Bernard's voice rang out, his face all smiles. "My son Kalan is now becoming formally engaged with Miss Rowling and Miss Alice."

As he spoke, Bernard walked over to Kalan's side. Pointing at Rowling, he said, "This is Miss Rowling, the principal wife of my son Kalan. And this is Miss Alice."

Instantly, the main hall became filled with quiet murmurs. Every so often, someone would sneak a furtive look at Linley.

"Everyone, let's begin the banquet!" Bernard laughed merrily.

All of the nobles in the main hall entered the banquet area. During the banquet, the members of the Debs clan were extremely friendly and warm to everybody. But nonetheless, there were still many nobles who would continue to glance at Alice, then glance at Linley.

Holding a glass of wine, Linley walked over to a secluded corner of the main hall, casually seating himself in a sofa.

"Boss, I can hear so many people chatting about you." Bebe leapt onto Linley's legs.

Linley gently sipped the wine in his glass. "Let them talk if they wish to. I'm fine with it. Only...Alice most likely is suffering."

Nowadays, towards Alice, Linley's emotions were calm and peaceful.

Only now did he understand what a huge influence this sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', had upon Alice's life.

Seated in that corner, Linley quietly watched as Kalan, Alice, and Rowling moved from table to table, meeting with guests. He quietly drank his wine by himself.

"Lord Linley, why are you here drinking wine all by your lonesome?" A beautiful young lady with jade hair and snow white skin walked over, sitting down quite naturally next to Linley while extending her glass of wine towards him.

Linley clinked glasses with her.

"My name is Sasha [Shasha]. Before the banquet began, I had been hoping I would have a chance to chat with you, Lord Linley. But it seemed as though you attracted quite a lot of attention from the girls. I didn't have a chance at all." Sasha laughed.

Linley looked at Sasha.

Sasha was very tall and slender, and her laughter was rich and vibrant. Her eyes also held a bewitching, intoxicating gaze. Compared to those young noble ladies, a female like this had a more feminine charm.

"The girls? Can it be that yourself aren't a girl, Sasha?" Linley asked with engrossed 'curiosity'.

Sasha took a light sip of wine, then laughed. "A girl? I've been married for eight years now. How could I be a girl?"

Linley couldn't help but be startled.

"However...my husband died on the day of our wedding." Sasha glanced at Linley as she spoke in a soft voice.

"Uh..." Linley stared at Sasha in astonishment.

Seeing the look on Linley's face, Sasha couldn't help but begin to laugh a charming laugh, and then she raised her glass and had another sip of red wine. Smiling, she said to Linley, "Lord Linley. You really...are too cute."

Linley couldn't help but laugh as well.

This Sasha really was an interesting person.

"Sasha. What are you doing here?" Duke Patterson walked over with a laugh.

Sasha glanced back at Duke Patterson. Feigning anger, she said, "Lord Duke, I just started chatting with Lord Linley. Fine, fine. Go ahead and have your talk with him." As she spoke, she winked at Linley, then left.

Duke Patterson stared at Sasha's departing silhouette for a moment before sitting down next to Linley.

"Linley, what do you think?" Duke Patterson said to Linley.

"What do I think about what?"

"Sasha, of course." Duke Patterson looked at Linley suggestively. "Linley, amongst the circle of nobles, Sasha is a beautiful lady who is chased after by many. Look at Sasha's figure, her eyes, her little mouth. Oh..."

Linley could only laugh.

"Let me tell you, Sasha should be very interested in you. If you seize this opportunity, you should be able to get her into your hands." Patterson patted Linley on the shoulders.

Linley glanced at Patterson. "Not interested."

Patterson stared at Linley in surprise.

"Linley." Patterson lowered his voice as he spoke to Linley. "Tonight, after this banquet is over, don't leave in a rush. There's something I wish to discuss with you."

Linley was startled.

As secretive as that?

"You wouldn't not give me face, right?" Patterson feigned anger.

Linley glanced at Patterson, musing to himself, "I want to see what you are up to." Linley rather wanted the chance to get a bit...closer...to Patterson as well.

"Lord Duke, don't worry. Tonight, I will wait a while for you." Linley smiled as he replied.

Eight o'clock that night. Many of the nobles had already left, but Linley was in no hurry. He still remembered his appointment with Patterson.

"I want to see what you are up to."

Linley waited quietly in the main hall.

"Linley, I'll leave now." Clayde said to Linley as he left. The people in the main hall grew fewer and fewer. Getting rather impatient, Linley left the main hall, stepping onto the outside balcony to enjoy the cool night wind.

Right at this moment, a manservant quietly walked up to him.

"Lord Linley. The Lord Duke is inviting you for a walk." The manservant said quietly.

"As secretive as this?" Linley was a bit surprised.

"Lead the way." On the surface, Linley looked calm. Bebe remained curled up inside Linley's robes. The manservant led Linley to a very dark, secluded alley. Judging from the appearance of the road, this was a place where people rarely came.

"Where are we going?" Linley said in a low voice.

The manservant said respectfully, "Lord Linley, this is in accordance with the Lord Duke's instructions. No one is to see you, Lord Linley."

"Oh?"

Linley furrowed his brows. But Linley wasn't afraid. He continued to follow the servant forward, as the two of them made their way through the dark, secluded alley, then passed through a small copse of trees. A secret door was opened, and they arrived at a small building.

"So the Debs clan has a place as secretive as this." Linley said to himself.

Unless someone was capable of flight, it would be quite difficult indeed to spot this hidden little building.

The manservant led Linley directly into the main hall.

"Lord Duke, Lord Linley is here." The manservant called out respectfully as they reached the main hall's doorway.

"Haha, Linley is here?" Dressed in a long black robe, Duke Patterson stepped out of the main hall. Seeing Linley, a gleam of excitement appeared in Duke Patterson's hawk-like eyes, and he hurriedly walked over. "Linley, come in, quick."

The manservant respectfully said, "Lord Duke, I'll be leaving then."

"Yes, you can go." Patterson said casually.

The manservant respectfully bowed and turned to leave. But then, the smiling Duke Patterson suddenly shot out his right arm at high speed, viciously piercing through the manservant like a knife, from his back to his chest.

"Ah!" The manservant disbelievingly turned his head and stared at Duke Patterson. He totally couldn't understand why the powerful Duke Patterson would stoop to killing someone like him!

Unfortunately, with his heart totally shattered, in just a few seconds, the light fled from his eyes.

"Lord Duke, the meaning of this is...?" Linley, off to the side, still managed to maintain his calm.

Duke Patterson was a warrior of the seventh rank. For him to kill a manservant who was at most a warrior of the first or second rank was indeed very easy.

From within his clothes, Duke Patterson drew out a handkerchief, using it to wipe off the blood from his hand. And then, he casually tossed it on the ground.

“Linley. It’s nothing. I just didn’t want anyone to know that you and I met.” Duke Patterson chortled.

Linley looked suspiciously at Duke Patterson. “You don’t want anyone to know?”

Duke Patterson nodded confidently. “Don’t worry at all. This secret meeting place was arranged by Bernard per my instructions. Bernard only knows that I’ll use this place, but he doesn’t know who I meet with. The only servant who knows that we have met is dead now. Thus, no one will know that we have met.”

Linley made up his mind. He stepped into the main hall.

“Duke Patterson. This matter seems to be quite important.” Linley smiled at Duke Patterson.

Patterson nodded. “Of course. And, I have arranged for a decoy as well. In the eyes of others, I have returned to my estate long ago. Aside from Bernard and my housekeeper, I’m afraid you are the only one who knows I am here.”

“A decoy?”

“Duke Patterson, what exactly do you intend to do, for you to meet with me here so secretly?” Linley asked with some curiosity.

Duke Patterson looked around the area, then closed the door to the main hall.

“Come. Let’s chat inside.” Pulling Linley by the hand, Duke Patterson headed for a room within the main hall. After entering the room, Duke Patterson activated a mechanism. With a grinding sound, the stone wall began to move, revealing a stone passageway.

So within this secret little building, there was a secret underground room as well.

“Linley. Come in.” Patterson smiled at Linley.

Linley nodded and stepped inside.

The inside of the underground room was pitch dark. Patterson lit three candles, then turned to smile at Linley.

"There's nothing for it. Neither my Duke's manor nor your own manor is suitable. There are too many spies in both places. It's not safe." Duke Patterson let out a long breath.

Linley also knew that his manor was under constant surveillance from the Radiant Church as well as Clayde.

Because this manor was gifted to him by Clayde. The servants belonged to Clayde as well. It was quite normal for the place to be filled with Clayde's spies. At the same time, his guard corps belonged to the Radiant Church. Frankly speaking, Linley's actions within his manor was under the constant, watchful eye of these two parties.

"Duke Patterson. Today, the topic of our conversation seems to be quite important. Go ahead, tell me what this is all about." Linley smiled.

Patterson withdrew a magicrystal card from his clothes. "Linley. There are ten million gold coins in this card."

"Ten million gold coins?" Linley waited for Patterson's explanation.

Patterson said helplessly, "Linley, I'll tell you the truth. After my elder brother tasked me with the position of Minister of Finance for the kingdom, I have used my authority to accumulate wealth for myself. Up until now, my activities have been hidden perfectly, but this time, the smuggling activity I engaged in with another clan was simply too large-scale. Based on what my sources tell me, my elder brother...may have already found out."

Patterson still held to his, as he did not reveal that the clan in question was the Debs clan.

"The smuggling was on too large a scale? But does this have anything to do with me?" Linley laughed as he looked at Patterson.

Patterson hurriedly said, "Of course this has something to do with you. Although I am King Clayde's younger brother, I know very well that when he makes his move, he never shows any mercy at all. I must find a path of retreat. After all, over the course of all these years, I have done too many things. Once this affair comes to light, many other affairs will be dug up as well."

"Thus...I want you to speak on my behalf with young master Yale of the Dawson Conglomerate. I know that you are good friends with Yale." A hint of a smile appeared on Patterson's face.

"Yale?" Linley began to understand Patterson's intentions.

Patterson said helplessly, "In the future, when these events come to pass, there are not many local powers capable of rescuing me from Fenlai City. But the Dawson Conglomerate is definitely one of them. The Kingdom of Fenlai does not dare to offend the Dawson Conglomerate! At the same time, the Radiant Church will not go to loggerheads against the Dawson Conglomerate for the sake of a minor corruption scandal."

"As long as the Dawson Conglomerate is willing to act, they can easily rescue me. However, I spoke with the Dawson Conglomerate, and they were not willing to offend King Clayde on my behalf." Patterson looked hopefully at Linley.

"Linley, Yale is the son of the Chairman of the Dawson Conglomerate. His words are extremely influential. What's more, the Dawson Conglomerate values you quite highly as well. As long as you are willing to help me, there definitely won't be any problems." Duke Patterson begged. "If you don't help me, I most likely am going to die. I beg of you, please help. No one will know that you and I have spoken."

"As long as you are willing to save me, these ten million gold coins are yours, Linley. I beg you." Patterson's words were very sincere. His eyes were filled with hope!

Linley laughed.

"No one will know?" Linley's smile was incandescent.

"Right. No one will know." Patterson hurriedly nodded. A look of joy had already appeared in his eyes.

Suddenly, Linley's body began to transform at a high speed. Black draconic scales began to come out of his body, while a single black horn sprouted out of his forehead. His two hands transformed into draconic claws. His pupils also transformed from their original color to the dark, golden color of the Armored Razorback Wurm.

"You..." Duke Patterson's face changed. Knowing that something was wrong, he hurriedly roused his own battle-qi, and all of the muscles of his body began to tighten.

"Whoosh!"

Linley's iron-whip-like tail slashed through the air with a terrifying howl. Given Duke Patterson's reaction time and speed, he was unable to avoid it, and it landed a vicious blow on his body.

"WHACK!"

Patterson, warrior of the seventh rank, was sent flying. Blood splattered everywhere.

But then in the next instant, that whip-like tail wrapped around Patterson. The sounds of bones clattering could be heard as Patterson's entire body was bound tightly, preventing him from moving in the slightest. Patterson struggled as much as he could, but his arms were unable to break free from his bonds.

Linley controlled his draconic tail to pull Patterson towards himself.

Linley was now under full Dragonform. His cold, merciless, dark golden eyes stared death directly into Patterson's eyes. A hint of a cruel smile played about the corners of Linley's lips. "You say....no one will know? Haha. That's just perfect. I've waited so very long for this opportunity."

"You...you..." Patterson had been absolutely scared stupid by this sudden development.

Chapter 11

His entire body was covered in black scales, while sharp black spikes jutted out from his elbows and his knees. His entire back was lined with a row of sharp spikes coming from his spine. And his eyes had turned a dark golden color. Just seeing that cold, dark, golden set of eyes staring at him was enough to terrify Duke Patterson.

"Who are...who are you?" Duke Patterson was so terrified that his face was ashen white. His mouth flapped for a long while before he managed to say these words.

What was this monstrosity in front of him?

"Who am I?" Linley's cold gaze was fixed on Patterson.

"Squeak, squeak." The sounds of bones chattering emanated from throughout Patterson's body, as Linley continued to apply force through his iron-whip-like tail in constricting Patterson. No matter how hard Patterson struggled, he couldn't budge at all.

Pain began to spread from his arms to the rest of his body.

"You are from another plane?" Patterson's eyes were filled with terror. From what he could tell, based on Linley's current appearance, only a different species from another plane could do what Linley had just done. "Linley, I beg you, spare me, spare my life. I definitely will keep your secret, definitely."

Transfixed by Linley's dark golden gaze, Patterson had totally lost his equanimity.

"Spare your life?" A hint of a cold smile appeared on Linley's face. "That's not impossible. I want to ask you something. Around twelve or thirteen years ago, did you send some people out to kidnap a woman."

Patterson was startled.

He immediately frantically tried to recollect the affairs of twelve or thirteen years past, but twelve or thirteen years was an extremely long period of time. Most importantly... "Linley, no, Lord Linley, I...I can't remember." Patterson said frantically.

"That was a long time ago, and I often would have women I took a fancy to captured and brought to my mansion. I don't know exactly which one you are talking about."

That murderous intent in Linley's heart began to grow.

This Patterson actually often abducted women?

From Linley's face, Patterson had no idea as to the transformation that was currently occurring in Linley's heart. Having completely undergone the Dragonform, Linley appeared totally cold and emotionless, terrifying sinister.

"A woman who had just given birth not long beforehand, who had just finished a pilgrimage to the Radiant Temple, and then returned to her hotel." Linley still stared icily at Patterson. His voice didn't rise at all.

Hearing Linley say these things, Patterson's entire body went stiff. And then he stared at Linley in astonishment.

"You remember now?" Linley said coldly.

Of course Patterson remembered now. Throughout all these years, he had only abducted women who had just given birth on two occasions. His memories of these affairs was quite keen. Especially that one time, thirteen years ago. That time, the person whom had instructed him to act had severely warned him to maintain secrecy.

"I really can't remember." Patterson said, terrified. "Lord Linley, I beg you, spare me. I really don't know. You must be mistaken."

Linley's dark golden eyes flashed.

"You want to die?" Linley's voice grew even colder.

"Ahhhh!" Patterson's screamed in torture as Linley's tail increased the pressure around him. This greater pressure was causing all of the bones in Patterson's body to moan in protest.

"Clatter. Clatter." The sound of bones nearly cracking was enough to make one's heart shudder.

But Linley still only stared coldly at Patterson.

"Crunch!"

"Ahhhhh!"

The crisp sound of a bone snapping, mixed with the tortured screams of Patterson. His left arm bone had actually been snapped clean by this terrifying pressure.

"Not bad." Linley's lips quivered slightly. As though he were smiling.

But Patterson didn't view it as a smile. Under the Dragonform, the slight curve of Linley's lips only filled Patterson's with even more fear.

"You know what matters and what doesn't. The vast majority of your battle-qi has been used to protect your vital organs. Only a small amount of battle-qi was used to protect your arm. It's true. A broken arm isn't a life-threatening condition. But if your organs were to rupture, then you really will lose your life." Linley's voice was very calm.

Patterson felt his throat go dry.

He had never imagined that Linley would have such a terrifying side.

"Now, do you remember yet?" Linley asked again.

Patterson really wanted to answer him, but when he thought about the punishment which would await him if he spoke, he couldn't help but shudder. His face growing still more pitiful, he cried out miserably, "Lord Linley, I beg of you, don't torture me. I really don't know. Even if you kill me, I still don't know."

Patterson firmly believed that, with this affair having been over thirteen years ago and Linley being so young, there was no way Linley could be certain about what had happened.

Most likely, Linley had received some sketchy details and was not absolutely certain. As long as he clenched his teeth and refused to speak, perhaps Linley would believe him in the end.

“Lord Linley, if I knew, I would’ve told you long ago, and avoided all this suffering. Lord Linley, I beg of you, please investigate this matter clearly.” Tears began to pour out of Patterson’s eyes, and his face was a picture of sincerity. If it weren’t for the fact that Linley had read that letter from his father, he might really have hesitated.

Staring at Patterson, Linley’s lips began to curve upwards even more.

Patterson’s heart felt a sudden chill.

“Good. Wonderful.” Linley’s tail was still wrapped around Patterson. Suddenly, the draconic tail sent Patterson smashing directly, viciously into the stone floor. Fortunately, though, Linley smashed Patterson feet-first, rather than head-first.

Linley gave full reign to the power of his draconic tail!

Patterson’s two legs smashed against the stone floor.

“Crush!”

The sound of bones splintering instantly, mixed with Patterson’s terrifying, high-pitched howls of agony.

On Patterson’s left knee, the shattered white bone was visible to the eye, piercing both through his leg and his pants. His right leg, even worse off, simply lay limply on the ground, while blood stained his pants around the ankles in particular.

“Ahhh! Ahhhh! Ahhhh!” Patterson was screaming nonstop.

This level of pain was killing him. Fortunately, though, his organs had been protected by his battle-qi, and so his life was not yet in danger.

“Demon. Demon.” Patterson was cursing nonstop in his heart. He knew what a tremendous force Linley was using. Based on his strength as a warrior of the seventh rank, he was only just barely able to protect his internal organs with his battle-qi, and couldn’t protect the rest of his body.

Patterson didn’t want to die.

Crippled legs?

Not a problem. With enough money, he definitely could invite a Grand Magus of the ninth-rank of the Radiant Church to use the ‘Song of Life’ on him. As long as he didn’t already die, any wound, no matter how serious, could be healed!

"Do you remember yet? That woman you abducted?" Linley's voice was still very calm, not rising in the slightest.

But the terror in Patterson's heart was growing.

"I remember. I remember." Beads of sweat were flowing down Patterson's face. Not from pain. From fear.

Patterson knew very well that in this sealed underground room in which he and Linley were currently in, nobody outside could hear anything, no matter how loud the screams. Perhaps someone directly outside, leaning against the stone door, could just barely hear something.

But who would be outside of this secret little room, pressing their ears against the stone door?

No matter how loud he screamed, no one would know.

"If you said so earlier, wouldn't you have suffered less?" Linley's dark golden eyes stared peacefully at Patterson. "Speak, then. Explain what happened to me."

Patterson hurriedly nodded. "Lord Linley, that year, that woman was extremely beautiful. I was bewitched, and hatched an evil plot to abduct that woman and bring her back to my place. I wanted that woman to sleep with me, but she was too headstrong. She committed suicide by ramming her head against the stone wall."

Stuttering as he spoke, Patterson looked at Linley.

In Patterson's opinion, there were very few people who knew what had really happened to that woman. Linley shouldn't have had any clue.

"You continue to lie!!!"

Linley finally grew angry. Those dark golden eyes seemed to slowly turn red. Using his draconic tail, Linley brought Patterson directly before him. Linley all but pressed his face directly against Patterson's, coldly staring into his eyes.

Pressed against Linley, seeing Linley's black scales and the black horn on his forehead, Patterson grew even more terrified.

"I'm not lying! I'm not lying!" Patterson hurriedly said.

Linley's hands, already transformed into claws by the Dragonform, suddenly delivered a mighty slap to Patterson's face.

“THWACK!” Five pieces of flesh were ripped from Patterson’s face, and blood began to flow out in a steady stream. Fortunately, Linley wasn’t trying to kill him. Otherwise, he would’ve crushed Patterson’s brain to a pulp with this blow.

“Sob...sob...sob...” Patterson was in so much pain that his voice changed.

Linley stared coldly at Patterson. “Patterson, listen closely. I already know very much about what had happened, which is why it’s best for you not to lie to me. Otherwise, the torment you will suffer definitely will not be limited to just this. Let me tell you this. The woman that you abducted was my mother!”

“Mother?” Patterson was stunned, even forgetting his pain for the moment.

“I am very clear about what happened that day with my mother, and I have been investigating this entire time. Thus, it’s best if you tell me everything about what happened to my mother. Otherwise...you will definitely die.” Linley’s voice grew even more freezing.

Actually, no matter what Patterson said, he was still definitely going to die.

Because Linley’s father had been pursued and heavily injured by Patterson’s men, and had died as a result. Patterson didn’t yet know that the person he had sent people out to hunt and kill was Linley’s father. If he had known...perhaps Patterson would be reacting in a totally different way.

“Tell me. Who did you give my mother to?” Linley stared at Patterson.

“You knew?” Patterson’s face turned pale.

Linley actually knew that he had given the woman away to someone else?

“Tell me his name, but you’d best not lie to me. If I discover that you have lied to me, I will make your life worse than death.” Linley’s voice was very calm again, not rising in the slightest.

Patterson hesitated for a moment.

“There’s no use for me to tell you. You can’t kill him.” Patterson said in a low voice.

“Can’t kill him?” Linley stared coldly at Patterson. “Patterson, listen to me. All you have to do is tell me who that person is. As for whether or not I can kill him, that’s none of your concern. Do you think you know what my real level of ability is?”

Hearing these words, Patterson secretly agreed.

The 'Linley' in front of him was too terrifying. The power he had previously displayed had already made others believe he was an absolute genius. But apparently, Linley's real power was far greater than that of a warrior of the seventh rank. In front of Linley, he didn't have the slightest ability to resist.

Patterson began to furiously calculate in his mind.

Linley didn't rush him, only fixing Patterson with his dark golden gaze.

After pondering a long time, Patterson gritted his teeth and looked at Linley. "Linley, I'll tell you who he is, but you have to guarantee that you definitely won't let anyone know that I was the one who told you! And, you have to promise you won't kill me."

Linley's face was still as cold as ever. "Fine. I guarantee that I will not tell anyone that you were the one to tell me. And, I guarantee I will not kill you."

Only now did Patterson secretly let out his breath.

"About twelve years ago, on one occasion, we members of the royal clan of Fenlai went to pay a visit to the Radiant Temple. Within the Radiant Temple, we saw your mother. Afterwards, I sent people to abduct your mother." Patterson immediately said, "But that wasn't actually my own intent. I was obeying the orders of another."

"Who?" Linley asked.

Patterson glanced at Linley. He slowly said, "The orders came from my elder brother. The current ruler of the Kingdom of Fenlai. King Clayde."

"Clayde?" Linley was startled.

The pride of the Kingdom of Fenlai, the 'Golden Lion', Clayde? The warrior of the ninth rank, Clayde?

"Yes. It was Clayde." Patterson said with certainty. "But I know that Clayde valued your mother highly. He even told me that no matter what, I couldn't let this information out, as if I did, I would definitely die."

Linley looked at Patterson.

"He should be telling the truth." Doehring Cowart's voice rang out in Linley's mind. "I can sense the vibrations of his soul."

Linley made up his mind.

Patterson looked beseechingly at Linley. "Linley, can you spare my life? I guarantee that I definitely won't say a single word about what happened today to anyone." Patterson's eyes were filled with hope.

"Fine. I'll keep my promise." Linley's draconic tail loosened.

Patterson's body dropped to the floor. A look of wild joy appeared on Patterson's face, and he looked at Linley with eyes filled with gratitude.

Right at this moment, a black blur flashed by.

"Crunch."

The little Shadowmouse, Bebe, bit Patterson's neck. Patterson stared with terror at Bebe. He had just escaped from death's door, but now, he could already seem to feel the call of the Netherworld. Patterson could tell that the little Shadowmouse was the one which was always on Linley's shoulders.

Disbelievingly, Patterson stared at Linley.

"I said I wouldn't kill you. But I never said my magical beast wouldn't kill you." Linley looked coldly at Patterson, whose throat was spurting out blood. "Let me tell you something else as well. Several months ago, there was a man who snuck into your Duke's mansion. Afterwards, you sent people after him to kill him. And that man...was my father!"

Chapter 12

Just before his death, Patterson finally understood.

He had, after all, participated in Linley's father's funeral. He knew that Linley's father was already dead.

The funny thing was, just now, he had been hoping that he could leave with his life. But now, he completely understood why Linley had done what he had done. Deep in Patterson's heart, he was unwilling to be resigned to dying like this. Based on his prowess as a warrior of the seventh rank, it wouldn't be too hard to live for another two or three hundred years.

His life should still be long.

"I'm dying, but Clayde, your life won't be much better." As Patterson's soul was drawn to the Netherworld, it contained a thread of hatred, hatred for his brother Clayde.

.....

After watching Patterson die, Linley returned to his normal form.

"Clayde. So the man behind this event was Clayde." Linley frowned deeply.

Clayde himself was a combatant of the ninth rank. Even if Linley was in full Dragonform, he would be at most an early eighth rank combatant.

Clayde was on a totally different level compared to him. Even if Linley were to ambush him, he simply could not harm a warrior of the ninth rank. The gap between them was too great.

And Clayde had tremendous power at his disposal as well.

As the revered ruler of Fenlai, how could he not have many fighters under his banner? And, having been the ruler for many years of the Kingdom of Fenlai, the leading kingdom amongst the six kingdoms of the Holy Union, he had a very close relationship with the Radiant Church. His roots were extremely deep.

In terms of both strength as well as forces available, Linley could not compare to Clayde.

"Perhaps my only advantage right now is that I am operating hidden in the shadows." Linley constantly pondered how to deal with Clayde.

Doehring Cowart appeared from within the Coiling Dragon ring. He immediately urged Linley, "Linley, don't waste any more time here. What you need to do right now is to destroy anything that might reveal you were here. Get back to your own estate immediately, otherwise, if you return too late, when they begin investigating who killed Patterson, they might suspect you."

Linley was startled awake.

Right!

His only advantage was that he was operating from within the shadows. No matter what, he couldn't allow Clayde to be on guard against him.

“Time to burn the evidence to ashes.” Linley immediately generated several dozen fireballs which surrounded Patterson’s body. Based on his current spiritual energy, the temperature of his fireballs was quite high.

Patterson’s body quickly began to burn, while at the same time, an extremely foul odor began to fill the air. After a while, only a few charred yellow bones and ashes remained.

That foul odor made Linley frown.

“Linley, your clothes.” Doehring Cowart reminded.

Linley looked down at his clothes. Indeed. After having gone through the Dragonform transformation, his clothes had been totally ripped apart. Linley retrieved his things, and then removed his outer jacket and pants without the slightest hesitation. Instantly, he burnt his clothes to ashes as well.

Linley immediately activated the mechanism.

“Rumble rumble.” The stone door once more opened, and Linley hurriedly walked out, then closed the door again.

No matter what, it was best for the stone door to be closed. Otherwise, with the door open, that smell of burnt flesh would quickly draw people’s attention.

“There should be clothes within this room.” Linley glanced down at his underwear. Clearly, he couldn’t walk out just in his ruined underwear like this. That would definitely arouse suspicion. Linley immediately went to another room on the side, opening up a dresser.

The dresser was filled with sets of clothes.

Linley selected a set of black clothes, rather similar to the outfit he had worn to the engagement ceremony. Putting the clothes on, Linley then once more used his wind-style spells to blow away the nearby specks of blood as well as that foul odor of burning flesh.

“Best to go back early. Can’t let anyone notice anything.” Moving at high speed, Linley leapt straight through the courtyard, arriving at the front courtyard in a matter of minutes.

At this point in time, there were still a few nobles remaining, engaging in idle conversation.

“Oh, Lord Linley. You haven’t left yet?” Count Juneau was heading out as well. Seeing Linley not too far away, he warmly greeted Linley.

Linley smiled. “Right. Just then, my stomach felt a bit queasy, so I went to the privy.”

Count Juneau walked out shoulder-to-shoulder with Linley.

“Lord Linley, I must say that I am a big fan of your sculptures. I was the one who bought your very first three sculptures that you exhibited at the main hall of the Proulx Gallery.” Count Juneau said proudly to Linley. The thing which Count Juneau was proudest was most likely the fact that he had been the one to purchase the first three sculptures which Linley had put on display.

Those three sculptures of Linley’s, just judging from the outside, was perhaps only worth six or seven thousand gold coins.

However...Linley’s status was now very different. He was the master sculptor who had carved ‘Awakening From the Dream’. In terms of status, he wasn’t too much off from the levels of Proulx and Hope Jensen. How could the price of the very first three sculptures a person such like this exhibited be low?

Based on his calculations and the implicit value, these three sculptures which Count Juneau had collected were most likely each worth at least a hundred thousand gold coins!

This was perhaps the collection which Count Juneau was the most delighted over, ever. Count Juneau had decided that these three items needed to be kept in his collection. He believed...as Linley’s future accomplishments became greater and greater, the value of these three sculptures would rise as well.

“Lord Linley, have a safe trip.” The housekeeper for the Debs clan said respectfully at the gate for the Deb’s clan’s manor.

Linley nodded. Bidding farewell to Count Juneau, he entered his own carriage.

“Go back.” Linley gave a calm command upon entering the carriage.

“Yes, milord.”

The Radiant Church warrior of the seventh rank who served as a driver bowed in acknowledgment, then immediately began driving the carriage towards Linley’s manor.

"I probably spent around fifteen minutes or so with Patterson." Linley took out his pocket watch and took a glance.

This was one of the gifts that the many well-wishers of his had sent him upon him being conferred the rank of Marquis.

"Fifteen minutes or so. Count Juneau and the rest were amongst the last pack of guests to leave. If they don't investigate extremely carefully, it shouldn't be possible for them to suspect me." Linley said to himself. "The other problem is, Patterson said that his housekeeper knew that he was going to meet with someone, but not exactly who."

Linley frowned. "But I can't totally trust his words. Perhaps his housekeeper did in fact know he was going to meet me, but Patterson wanted me to relax and trust him and thus claimed no one else knew."

Linley had considered this possibility.

Patterson's housekeeper!

This definitely was a flaw.

What's more...if there really was an investigation, people might discover that Linley had disappeared for fifteen minutes at the end. But during that period of time, all the nobles were engaged in casual conversation and were leaving haphazardly. It would most likely be extremely difficult to clearly investigate a single person, given those circumstances.

"At least no one personally witnessed my meeting with Patterson. The one attendant who did see was killed by Patterson." Linley said to himself.

At most, others might suspect him. But there was no actionable evidence against him.

"Boss, what are you thinking about?" Bebe was lying on Linley's legs. Raising his little head, he looked at Linley.

"Nothing." Linley rubbed Bebe's little head, having totally calmed down.

"Milord, we have arrived."

Linley pushed open the carriage curtains, then raised his head and stared up at the boundless sky. Right now, the night sky was filled with stars. Linley couldn't help but feel a carefree joy in his heart, while at the same time, his resolve to kill Clayde grew still more firm. "Patterson died today. Next one up is Clayde."

Patterson had disappeared for a day or two. Aside from Patterson's housekeeper, no one noticed that something was amiss.

Within the Debs clan's manor, there was only Bernard and a jade-haired middle-aged person.

"Bernard, on the night of Kalan's engagement, did the Lord Duke depart from your manor?" The jade-haired middle-aged man asked. This man was Duke Patterson's housekeeper, named Lodi [Luo'di].

Bernard was forced to hold in his aggrieved feelings and refrain from saying, "Your Duke disappeared, and you are asking ME about it?" That night, Patterson hadn't even told Bernard whom he was going to meet, nor did he say a word when he left. How would he, Bernard, know anything?

"The Lord Duke left. The Lord Duke is not in my manor." Bernard replied directly.

The very day after the engagement ceremony, Bernard had sent someone over to dispose of the servant's corpse. His servants didn't find any trace of Patterson within that small building.

"Oh." Lodi frowned, then stared at Bernard. "Bernard, if you find any trace of my Duke, you must let me know immediately. This affair might be minor, or it might be major. If it becomes a major affair, even the smuggling affairs of your Debs clan might come to light."

Bernard's face changed.

"Alright, I'll go back now." Lodi left with a heavy mind.

Seeing Lodi's departing back, Bernard felt somewhat unsettled, and made the decision to immediately go visit that building which Patterson had used.

Within that secretive building inside the Debs clan's estate.

Bernard had entered alone. The corpse of that dead servant had long since been removed and disposed of by the people Bernard had sent. Looking at the building, Bernard frowned. "Duke Patterson said he was going to meet with a guest, but in the end, he didn't return home. Could it be..."

Bernard suddenly thought of one possibility.

Very few people even in the Debs clan knew about the secret underground room. Naturally, those people he had sent to dispose of the corpse wouldn't know either, nor would they go investigate.

But Bernard had told Duke Patterson of the secret underground room. He had also told the Duke that there was definitely no one who could eavesdrop on any conversations within.

"Impossible. There's no way something like that could've happened." Bernard hurriedly ran into the main hall, then directly went to the mechanism and activated it.

"Rumble, rumble."

That wall-like 'stone door' slowly opened, while at the same time, a foul, bloody odor that smelt like burnt flesh wafted out.

The look on Bernard's face grew ugly.

Hurriedly walking into the secret room, he saw that on the granite floor, there were still traces of blood and scratches. To the side, there was a pile of charred human bones as well as ashes.

"Someone died here." Bernard was absolutely certain.

And then, the person who died had been burnt to ashes. But there was no way for Bernard to tell who it was for certain.

"Ring!" Bernard suddenly saw within the pile of ashes a dirty, grayish-silver ring. Upon seeing the ring, Bernard felt that it looked extremely similar to the ring which Duke Patterson liked to wear.

Instantly, all the blood fled from Bernard's face.

"Patterson is most likely dead." Bernard's thoughts were a chaotic mess.

The Debs clan had spent over half of their capital and a large amount of manpower in order to carry out this water jade smuggling operation with Duke Patterson's help. This was an extremely important business operation for the Debs clan. But if the smuggling became exposed...it wouldn't just be a problem of losing money. Most likely, the entire Debs clan would be exterminated by the furious King Clayde!

The entire Debs clan....was quite possibly finished.

"No, not possible. Duke Patterson was a warrior of the seventh rank. How could he die so easily? Given his careful personality, there is no way that he would meet in private with someone who was more powerful than him." Bernard couldn't accept what he was seeing.

It was true. Patterson was an extremely cautious man. Sadly, Patterson didn't have an accurate understanding of Linley's power.

.....

The entire city of Fenlai was peaceful. Linley continued to train quietly at his manor every day. But then, after Duke Patterson had disappeared for half a month, the previously calm and sedate King Clayde finally began to issue orders. The first step was to capture the Duke's housekeeper, Lodi. The next was to investigate the Duke's whereabouts on a wide scale.

Within the main hall of Linley's manor.

"Lord Linley, per his Majesty's decree, he would like Lord Linley to pay a visit to the palace."

Staring at the royal decree brought by the palace attendant, Linley felt a bit unsettled. Why was King Clayde summoning him?

"Please wait a moment. Allow me to change my clothes, and I'll head to the palace immediately afterwards." Linley smiled as he replied.

Chapter 13

The night was pitch-dark.

The sound of the carriage could be heard on the quiet road leading to the palace. Linley was sitting alone in the carriage, with Bebe on his legs. Next to the carriage, there were over ten knights on fine stallions, and leading them was the palace servant who had come.

Within the carriage.

Linley was frowning as he considered. "It's quite late already. But King Clayde suddenly summoned me to his palace. What is this about?" As the saying goes, only those who were blameless would always be relaxed.

Linley had just killed Patterson, and now he was very much aware that in the past, it was Clayde who had instructed Patterson to send people to abduct his mother. In other words, there was a deep enmity between him and Clayde.

Naturally, Linley was very careful around Clayde.

"I heard two days ago, Clayde seized the housekeeper of the Duke's manor, and has begun a wide scale investigation of Patterson's affairs. Patterson said that he hadn't told anyone about his meeting with me. But can I trust those words?" Linley felt uncertain.

Perhaps that housekeeper already knew about Patterson and Linley's meeting.

If that Duke's housekeeper informed King Clayde of the meeting, then naturally, Linley would be at the precipice of danger.

"Linley, don't worry."

Doehring Cowart's voice rang out in Linley's mind, reassuring him. "Linley, even if that Duke Patterson told his housekeeper that he was meeting with you, you would still be fine."

"Fine?" Linley looked questioningly at Doehring Cowart.

Doehring Cowart nodded confidently. "Naturally. Even if Clayde guessed that you killed Patterson, he still won't openly address it."

"Because...Clayde doesn't know the reason why you killed Patterson." Doehring Cowart's face was filled with confidence.

Linley was startled. Even if Clayde didn't know why he killed Patterson...he still would know Linley was the killer, right?

"It's simple. Judging from the conversation you had with Patterson in that underground room, his relationship with Clayde wasn't very good. While he was the Minister of Finance, Patterson engaged in widespread corruption. In his heart, Clayde probably didn't feel much affection for Patterson. What's more...Clayde doesn't know that there is enmity between the two of you. Thus, he won't act against you without cause. Because if he wishes to punish you, or to kill you, he would have to first get permission from the Radiant Church." His eyes gleaming, Doehring Cowart looked at Linley.

"Hrmph, can that Clayde really be considered a king? The Radiant Church has the authority to depose him from his rule. But you are someone whom the Radiant

Church values highly. Would he dare to casually act against you?" Doebling Cowart consoled Linley.

Linley nodded.

He understood this logic.

However...

Linley truly did not wish for Clayde to be on his guard against him. If Clayde became wary of Linley, how would Linley investigate his mother's whereabouts or take revenge on behalf of his mother?

"Open the door! It's me!" The palace attendant shouted in a shrill voice.

Hearing this, Linley immediately knew that they had already reached the palace gates. Like a giant beast, the gates squatted there, hulking. In just a half hour's time, countless carriages had entered and left the palace.

One of those carriages was Linley's. Another belonged to Bernard. And still others were carrying other nobles.

Within the business discussion hall of the palace.

Aside from the two guards standing at the door to the hall, everyone else present in the hall were nobles of high rank. In total, there were eight people present. These were Bernard, leader of the Debs clan. The Prime Court Magus, Linley. The Left Premier, Duke Bonalt. The Inspector General, Hampton [Han'pu'dun]...

"Linley, you came." Bernard greeted him warmly.

All of the nobles already present instantly greeted him as well. Seeing all of these nobles, Linley couldn't help but suddenly feel calm. It seemed that he had not been specially summoned after all.

"Milords, I wonder if any of you know why his Majesty has summoned us?" Linley immediately asked.

Duke Bonalt, as the Left Premier, knew a great deal of information.

"Most likely, this summons is related to the disappearance of Duke Patterson." Duke Bonalt replied with a warm laugh.

Bernard, off to the side, immediately asked, "Lord Duke, what does Duke Patterson's disappearance have to do with me? I don't have any important responsibilities at court."

"Today, his Majesty isn't summoning his entire court, merely investigating a matter. Otherwise, why would I be here, but not the Right Premier, and only a single Inspector General?" Duke Bonalt saw things quite clearly.

Bernard nodded.

But Bernard still felt very uneasy.

Ever since Patterson had disappeared, Bernard had been filled with unease. He feared that the involvement between his Debs clan and Duke Patterson in the water jade smuggling operation would be brought to light. If this affair was revealed, then the Debs clan would really be finished.

"His Majesty has arrived!"

Suddenly, the shrill voice of the palace attendant sounded out. From a side door to the hall, Clayde walked in, heading directly for a seat in front and sitting down, two palace attendants respectfully at his side.

"All hail his Majesty!"

All of the nobles present bowed and chanted.

Clayde glanced at the nobles. He calmly nodded, then said, "It's quite late at night already. I originally didn't wish to disturb all of you, but this issue regarding the disappearance of my second brother, Patterson, is too important. I was forced to summon all of you to come here."

"Might I ask, your Majesty, what Duke Patterson's disappearance has to do with your summons for us?" Linley immediately asked.

Of the eight people present before Clayde, perhaps only Linley would dare to speak to him in such a manner. Because while everyone else present was subordinate to Clayde, in reality, Linley was the subordinate of the Radiant Church, and was only a servant of the Kingdom of Fenlai in name.

"Linley, I just wish to clearly investigate this affair." Clayde smiled, and then said in a loud voice, "Bring out the Duke's housekeeper, Lodi."

Lodi? The Duke's housekeeper?

Both Linley and the Deb clan's leader Bernard felt their hearts start to pound.

The entire meeting hall was silent. Everyone quietly awaited Lodi being brought forward to testify. Linley still stood there, with the Shadowmouse Bebe on his shoulders.

After a short while...

Under escort by palace guards, a middle-aged man with jade-like hair walked in. This man looked very fragile, with mussed hair and a bewildered look on his face.

Bernard recognized this man at a single glance. This man in front of him was indeed Lodi, the housekeeper for Duke Patterson.

"Lodi, explain everything in detail." Clayde shouted towards Lodi.

Lodi clearly had already explained once to Clayde already. This explanation clearly was for the benefit of Linley and the others. Lodi said very honestly, "Your Majesty, on June 18th, when the Debs clan held that engagement ceremony, the Lord Duke also went to attend. But after the ceremony, the Lord Duke never came back."

"Lodi, stand to one side." Clayde said coldly.

"Yes, your Majesty." Lodi clearly was terrified. He hurriedly scurried off into a corner.

Clayde swept the eight nobles with his gaze.

"Based on the information from my investigations, the night of the engagement ceremony at the Debs clan, you all were amongst the last to leave. What I want to ask is, did any of you encounter Duke Patterson?" Clayde's question was very simple.

"Right after the banquet, Patterson departed." The Left Premier, Lord Bonalt, said in a loud voice.

Linley nodded as well. "I, too, saw Patterson departing quite early."

The others either said they didn't see him, or that Patterson left very early.

Hearing everyone speak, Clayde smiled and nodded, and then turned to Lodi again. "Lodi, continue."

"Yes." Lodi continued. "That night, before going to the Debs manor, Duke Patterson told me that he was going to be meeting with an extremely important person, but to

the importance of the discussion topic, nobody could know about it. Thus, he ordered me to arrange for a double to impersonate him and leave the manor. In truth, the Lord Duke would remain within the manor."

"The Lord Duke also said that the Debs clan would arrange for a safe, secret place for his meeting." Lodi added.

Upon hearing these words, Bernard Debs' face immediately turned white.

"Your Majesty! Your Majesty!"

Bernard hurriedly said, "This has nothing to do with me. The Lord Duke told me he wanted to meet with someone, so I arranged a meeting room for them. I couldn't refuse him."

"Bernard. Don't be hasty. I won't wrongly blame someone." Clayde smiled.

"Thank you, your Majesty." Bernard quickly stepped back, but his face was still pale.

Clayde turned to look at Linley and the others. "If Patterson was going to meet with someone, the person he was going to meet with should have some status. Who would that person be? I think...it must have been one of the last guests to leave."

Linley's heart trembled.

Duke Bonalt, Count Juneau, Marquis Hampton, and the others all stared at Clayde in astonishment. By now, they could guess why the king had called them here.

His Majesty was suspicious of them!

"Your Majesty, I definitely did not meet with him." Count Juneau, Marquis Hampton, and the others hurriedly said.

Clayde smiled. "I only have my suspicions. If none of you did anything to be guilty of, why be so nervous? Look, Linley's the calmest one here."

Linley smiled but didn't make a sound.

Clayde glanced at this group of people, laughing coldly in his heart. "I couldn't give a damn about who made Patterson disappear. In fact, I'd rather thank that person for giving me such a wonderful opportunity to eradicate all the secret connections Patterson has built up."

As the long-time Minister of Finance, Patterson had erected an enormous, dense web of connections. His influence was extremely large. Clayde didn't dare to casually

investigate Patterson either, as he didn't want to cause too many problems in the kingdom.

This was also the reason why the Debs clan had decided to work alongside Patterson.

But now, Patterson had disappeared. The group of dragons no longer had a leader.

Acting as fast as lightning, Clayde used various ruthless techniques to quickly clip off Patterson's wings and shatter the web of influence which Patterson had spent so long building up.

Without Patterson's guidance, those collaborators of his naturally would be in for a terrible time if they resisted. There was no way they could resist the pressure exerted by King Clayde.

Clayde looked at Linley and the others. Laughing, he said, "The disappearance of my second brother, Patterson, is something I must look into. But what surprised me was, I ended up discovering quite a few things. Lodi, in particular, spilled many secrets."

Linley couldn't help but look at Lodi.

"Lodi, tell them." Clayde smiled at Lodi.

Right now, Clayde was feeling extremely satisfied. The death of a brother, to Clayde, was no big deal at all. More importantly...all of the power within the Kingdom of Fenlai finally rested with him again.

Lodi respectfully said, "Your Majesty, that day, when Duke Patterson attended the engagement ceremony at the Debs clan, the reason he needed to meet with that mysterious person was that he wanted to start a relationship with the Dawson Conglomerate. Thus...the person he went to see absolutely has to have some sort of connection to the Dawson Conglomerate.

"The Dawson Conglomerate?"

Linley felt his heart shudder violently.

"Does everyone want to know why it was that my second brother wished to start a relationship with the Dawson Conglomerate?" Clayde laughed as he looked at the people present. "Lodi, continue."

"Yes." Lodi clearly had been totally cowed by Clayde, saying whatever he was told to. "Over these years, Duke Patterson had betrayed his country in many ways for his

own profit and for his own selfish motives. In these past few months in particular, he initiated a large-scale water-jade smuggling program with the Debs clan. In the entire history of our kingdom, this is the largest water-jade program that has ever existed."

"Smash!"

The leader of the Debs clan, Bernard, immediately knelt down, his knees smashing into the ground. He hurriedly said, "Your Majesty, I am being framed! Our Debs clan has always operated our businesses in an open, aboveboard manner. We've never acted in a way which was against the best interests of the kingdom. Our Debs clan is being framed!"

"Framed?" Clayde flicked a cold glance at Bernard.

"Bring in the Lanseer brothers!"

Upon hearing the words 'Lanseer brothers', the face of Bernard, clan leader of the Debs clan, lost all blood.

Chapter 14

For the sake of this water jade smuggling operation, the Debs clan had paid a very high price. Bernard ordered his Third Brother to be responsible for this affair, and the Lanseer brothers were his Third Brother's right and left hand men.

Standing in the middle of the meeting hall, Linley remained calm. The Shadowmouse, Bebe, also quietly stood on Linley's shoulders.

The man and the magical beast both just stood there as though nothing were happening, quietly watching it all. Even though he saw the begging look Bernard had trained on him, Linley didn't react in the slightest.

After a while...

The sound of heavy chains could be heard. Two golden-haired men in shackles entered the meeting hall, under escort from the palace guards. These two men were shackled by the feet and by the hands as well. Just judging from the thickness of those leg-irons, the shackles must have been one or two hundred pounds heavy.

Such heavy shackles were used expressly for collaring those warriors with powerful strength.

“Milord clan leader.”

Upon entering the discussion hall and seeing Bernard who was kneeling on the ground, strange smiles appeared on their faces. They actually called out to Bernard respectfully.

Standing to the side, Linley understood.

Most likely these Lanseer brothers were two of the major leaders in the smuggling operation who most likely had some secret connection with the Debs clan.

“The Debs clan is going to be in trouble now.” Linley just quietly watched.

Seeing those two shackled golden-haired men, Bernard reacted with confusion. “Uh? Lanseer and Langmuir [Lan’mu’er], why have the two of you been imprisoned by his Majesty? Didn’t I give the two of you a 100,000 gold coins a few months ago and tell you to go enjoy life?”

Those two golden-haired men were briefly startled, then they laughed.

“Milord clan leader, are you jesting?” Lanseer laughed.

Next to him, Langmuir snickered as well. “What, lord clan leader, do you still think that you can lie and hide? Forget it. You might as well admit your guilt.”

A look of rage appeared on Bernard’s face. He suddenly rose to his feet, staring angrily at Lanseer and Langmuir. “Lanseer, Langmuir, my Debs clan has raised you and cultivated you since you were little. The two of you should know very well how I have treated you.”

“It’s true, you have treated us brothers very well. But the two of us have also risked our lives for the Debs clan for many years now.” The elder brother, Lanseer, said coldly.

Bernard’s rage grew. With a trembling hand, he pointed at the Lanseer brothers. “The two of you truly forget favors and violate justice. True, you two have worked on behalf of the Debs clan for many years now, but all these years, you have been acting corruptly so as to gain money that belonged to the clan. After that event half a year ago, considering that the two of you had worked for us for so long, I spared your lives and even gave you a 100,000 gold coins and told you to go home and enjoy your lives. But...but you...not only are you not grateful, you’ve now participated in smuggling? And after getting caught, you sully the Debs clan?”

Lanseer and Langmuir were totally caught off-guard, and they stared at Bernard in bewilderment.

“We...we were corrupt? You...you gave us 100,000 gold coins?” Lanseer and Langmuir were totally flabbergasted.

Bernard’s rage exploding, he suddenly turned and knelt before Clayde. His tears cascading onto the ground, he said, “Your Majesty, these two are nothing more than a pair of insatiable wolves. When they were young, I saw that they were two pitiable orphans and so I took them in, and later gave them important positions. But they only acted to shovel my clan’s wealth into their own pockets. Despite that, considering the many years of affection between us, I spared their lives and even gave them 100,000 gold coins. This can be considered to be extremely benevolent and merciful of me. But now? Now they actually come here to sully and frame my Debs clan. They want to destroy the Debs clan! How vicious! Your Majesty, my heart is broken. My heart is broken!”

Seeing the miserable cries of Bernard, many of the nobles in the meeting hall did indeed begin to wonder if Lanseer and Langmuir really were framing the Debs clan.

“Bernard, you...you...” Lanseer and Langmuir were so enraged that their faces turned red, but they weren’t able to say a single word.

How much had these two brothers sacrificed for the Debs clan?

They were even willing to engage in smuggling for the clan, precisely because the two of them didn’t fear death. If it weren’t for the fact that this time, the offer from King Clayde was simply too enticing, they wouldn’t have betrayed the Debs clan.

But everything which Bernard was saying now was false!

“Oh? There’s an event such as this?” Clayde glanced at Bernard.

Clayde could sense that Bernard had come prepared, as otherwise, he wouldn’t have suddenly come up with all these lies. If he were to investigate, most likely he wouldn’t be able to find any flaws.

“Hrmph. It’s a pity that Third Brother of Bernard’s leapt into the river. We weren’t even able to find his corpse. Otherwise, with his Third Brother in front of him, Bernard would have nothing to say.” Clayde was furious.

Smuggling water jade.

Water jade mines were part of the national wealth of the kingdom. Which was to say, it was part of Clayde's wealth.

Illegally mining and smuggling water jade meant stealing from him, Clayde. Naturally, Clayde would feel furious.

But that Third Brother of Bernard's had leapt into the river to commit suicide, while Bernard had seemingly been prepared for Lanseer and Langmuir's betrayal.

"Bernard, I won't unjustly accuse an innocent man." Clayde said solemnly.

"Thank you, your Majesty! Thank you, your Majesty!" Bernard's face was covered with tears.

But Clayde announced coldly, "However, I also won't forgive a person who has betrayed the interests of his kingdom. Based on the intelligence that I have, it seems that the person responsible for this smuggling operating was your Third Brother."

"My Third Brother?" Bernard stared questioningly at Clayde.

Clayde stared coldly at Bernard. "What, do you have something to say?"

A wounded look on his face, Bernard said, "Of course I do. Your Majesty, I really don't know why you said what you just said, but over a year ago, my Third Brother left the Kingdom of Fenlai and began on a training excursion tour to various other countries. Just a few days ago, he sent a letter back to us."

Clayde's gaze grew colder.

His men had personally reported that when they were in the process of apprehending Bernard's Third Brother that the man, being heavily wounded, had elected to throw himself into the river. They couldn't find any trace of him.

"Your Majesty! Your Majesty! You must deliver justice!"

Bernard cast a furious glare at Lanseer and Langmuir. "You simply cannot believe the lies of these two despicable men and cast aspersions on the heart of a clan which is loyal to the kingdom."

"Bernard, you! You!" The furious and anxious Lanseer brothers didn't know what to say.

Clayde suddenly rose to his feet, staring coldly at Bernard. "I've already said that I will not unjustly accuse an innocent man, nor forgive a man who has betrayed the

interests of his kingdom. Based on the evidence I have at hand, there is at least a suspicion that your Debs clan has betrayed the kingdom. Guards!"

Bernard's face instantly changed. "Your Majesty! Your Majesty! I am loyal and faithful to the Kingdom!"

Two palace guards rushed into the meeting hall.

"Bernard." Clayde smiled at Bernard.

Bernard raised his head, looking beseechingly at Clayde, as though he were a child looking at his parents.

"Whether or not your clan is loyal is a question that will only be settled by evidence. I will give you a chance. I will not exterminate your clan right away."

In his heart, Bernard let out a sigh of relief. What he feared the most was that the Debs clan would instantly be exterminated. "Fortunately, I found those ashes and those remains within the secret room. It gave me the chance to prepare." Ever since that day, Bernard had been preparing. He had in fact made multiple levels of preparations.

"Guards, deliver Bernard as well as the successor to the Debs clan to the Blackwater Jails. As for this case involving the smuggling operations of the Debs clan, let the Right Premier Merritt [Mei'li'te] investigate." Clayde ordered.

Immediately, those two guards took Bernard away.

"Your Majesty! I believe in your Majesty's wisdom!" Bernard called to Clayde, even while being dragged away.

That night, the Greenleaf Road became a very energetic place.

Hoof steps and shouts unabated. Hundreds of knights directly surrounded the Debs clan's manor, terrifying all of the members of the Debs clan present.

"What are you doing? What are you doing? Do you know what place this is?" Kalan's second granduncle, the second uncle of Bernard, immediately shouted at those palace guards.

The leader of the knights said coldly, "Do you dare to go against the dictates of his Majesty?"

But this second granduncle only raised his head proudly. "The orders of his Majesty? Who knows if you are falsely claiming that you have an order from his Majesty? Speak! What do you want?"

"Second Granduncle, what's going on outside?"

By now, many of the members of the Debs clan had rushed over.

Even Alice and Rowling had gotten dressed and rushed over. In the Yulan continent, after the engagement ceremony, the fiancée normally would begin to live with the fiancé. But generally speaking, only after the marriage ceremony would the two of them enter their bridal chambers.

Naturally...

There were cases of people sharing a bedroom prior to the wedding as well, as long as both were willing.

"Big sister Alice, what's going on outside?" Rowling was holding onto Alice's hands.

Alice was bewildered as well. "I'm not sure."

The hundreds of people within the Debs clan's manor all streamed out, and most of them seemed bewildered. Only the core members of the clan who knew the truth about the smuggling operations began to feel frightened.

This smuggling operation of the Debs clan was an extremely large scale one.

Just to carry out the operation, they had used several tens of millions of gold coins. If they were successful, the profits would be several hundred million gold coins. What the Debs clan's elders thoughts were, once would be enough.

But it seemed this one operation had proved problematic.

"Big brother Kalan, what's going on?" Rowling asked Kalan as well.

Kalan shook his head, indicating he didn't know.

The squad of palace knights had assembled outside the manor. Their leader, the knight-captain, upon seeing so many members of the Debs clan present, withdrew the tablet of command from his clothes, shouting in a bright voice, "His Majesty orders that, as the Debs clan is under suspicion of engaging in the smuggling of water jade, the leader of the Debs clan as well as his successor are to be immediately jailed within the Blackwater Jails."

Instantly, the faces of every member of the Debs clan changed.

The faces of those core members of the Debs clan turned even more ashen, even paler. But Alice, Rowling, and those other members of the clan only felt astounded and bewildered.

Several guards stepped forward and grabbed Kalan.

“Take him away!”

The leader of the knights shouted.

At this moment, Kalan felt as though his limbs had gone soft. He allowed those guards to march him towards the gate. But once he reached the gate, he suddenly woke up and, turning his head, frantically called out, “Second Granduncle, Alice, you two have to save me, have to save me!”

Allowing Kalan to shout as much as he wanted, those palace guards emotionlessly escorted him off towards the jails.

Alice, Rowling, and the other members of the Debs clan could only watch as Kalan was taken away, unable to help. Their clan was powerful, true, but how could they resist against the king?

By the next morning, the news that the Debs clan was suspected of having engaged in water jade smuggling had spread across the entire noble circle of Fenlai City. Many of the nobles of Fenlai were paying special attention to this matter.

What’s more, this case was being personally handled by the Right Premier of the Kingdom of Fenlai, Duke Merritt.

Within Duke Merritt’s manor.

Lord Duke Merritt was already over seventy years old, but as a fairly powerful warrior, he looked as though he were only in his middle years. His short golden hair was slick and gleamed.

Right now, Duke Merritt was seated on a chair. He casually flicked a glance at his visitor from the Debs clan – the second granduncle of Kalan, Nimitz [Ni’mi’si].

“Lord Merritt, our clan has definitely been unjustly accused. I hope, lord, that you will be just to our clan.”

As he spoke, Nimitz pulled out a book from his side. "Lord Merritt, I know that you love to collect holy scripts. This holy script was issued by the Radiant Church over three thousand years ago. It's a rather rare one."

"Oh, a holy script?"

Merritt casually accepted it, but while flipping through it, Merritt suddenly noticed that stuck within the pages, there was a flat card. A flat card produced by the Golden Bank of the Four Empires. A magicrystal card!

A hint of a smile appeared on Merritt's face.

Nimitz was carefully observing Merritt's reactions. Merritt closed the holy script, putting it to the side, then smiled. "Nimitz, you should know that aside from holy scripts, I'm also a big fan of sculptures. A while ago, when I saw that 'Awakening From the Dream', I liked it very much. During your clan's engagement ceremony, I saw that Alice. Oh, she looked so very similar to that person in the sculpture. I wonder...if it would be possible for me to have a private chat with Alice."

Chapter 15

Have a private chat with Alice? Whether or not the Debs clan had engaged in the smuggling of water jade, what use would a private chat with Alice be to make that determination? Clearly, this Merritt had other designs. Nimitz was a person with significant worldly experience. Naturally, he knew exactly what was going on.

Nimitz's eyes narrowed as he stared at Merritt.

But Merritt only casually reclined on his chair, even closing his eyes as he relaxed himself. He didn't even look at Nimitz. Merritt's attitude spoke for itself: If you want your family's 'grievance' to be washed clean, then have Alice come talk to me about it.

Nimitz was quiet for a moment, then laughed. "So Lord Merritt is a fan of Master Linley's 'Awakening From the Dream'. It is understandable if you want to have a chat with Alice. Fine, I'll go back and speak with her."

Upon hearing these words, Merritt opened his eyes, smiling at Nimitz. "Haha, then Nimitz, you can go back now. If Alice is willing to have a good chat with me, I think I will have a better understanding of your Debs clan."

Nimitz immediately stood up, bowing modestly. "Then Lord Merritt, I take my leave. I entrust the affairs of our Debs clan with you."

Merritt nodded slightly.

Nimitz immediately departed.

Leaving behind Duke Merritt, alone in that living room.

Toying with his wine cup, Merritt mumbled in a low voice, "My goddess...Alice..." There was a look of satisfaction and anticipation on his face.

As the Right Premier of the Kingdom of Fenlai, and as a Duke, Merritt had an extremely exalted status. The number of people with a higher status than him in the Kingdom of Fenlai could be counted on one hand.

A person like him had experienced virtually any sort of woman he wished.

Merritt really was a lecher, despite being in his seventies. Warriors of his level could live to be over three hundred. Right now, he was only in his seventies and in the prime of his life. Merritt publicly had twelve wives to his name, but there was a common viewpoint amongst nobles; one's own wives at home weren't as interesting as having lovers outside, but having lovers outside weren't as interesting as those you couldn't get. Those whom you couldn't get were the best of all.

But given Merritt's status, there were very few women he was unable to get. At the same time, there were very few women who could truly move him.

But Alice was definitely one.

Ever since that sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream' had become famous, in the hearts of many, the woman of the sculpture had become an untouchable, lofty goddess. For someone of Merritt's stature, naturally he would deeply desire to get a goddess like Alice beneath his thighs. But this was really too difficult.

But now. An opportunity had come.

"Alice. The goddess?" Merritt was unable to repress his smile. Turning his head up, he drained all of the red wine from his glass.

Sitting within his carriage on the way home, Nimitz was frowning deeply.

Alice was Kalan's fiancée!

If he were to ask Alice to get meet privately with Merritt, then he definitely would be essentially pushing Alice into a disaster. In the future, when faced with Kalan's questioning, it wouldn't be a big deal. But if word of this were to spread, the impact it would have on the Debs clan's standing would be tremendous.

"Ugh. If the clan is finished, then what will its reputation matter?" Nimitz shook his head, sighing.

Right now, the Debs clan had reached a critical juncture. If the Debs clan was found to have been guilty of smuggling, then the entire clan would be exterminated, and all of its possessions would be taken by the King of Fenlai. Although the Debs clan had left behind some roots outside the kingdom, preventing it from being totally wiped out, almost all of its possessions were in the Kingdom of Fenlai.

If it was all lost, who knew how many years it would be before the Debs clan would return to its former glory?

Compared to the clan's future, a little bit of mockery and humiliation wasn't a big deal. After all, since when did the circle of nobles lack for embarrassing stories?

"But this has to be of Alice's own free will." Nimitz was a bit worried. "I can't forcibly deliver her to the Right Premier's manor, after all."

Nimitz didn't care at all about Alice's purity. She was just a woman, after all!

But Nimitz knew...

"This Alice has a special relationship with Linley. If I were to force her, and then Linley found out..." Just thinking about it made Nimitz frightened. Linley had a very special status within the Kingdom of Fenlai.

Although he had the rank of Marquis, in actuality, Linley belonged to the Radiant Church. In the past, when Clayde had invited Linley to join the ranks of the nobles in the Kingdom of Fenlai, he had even said that between the two of them, there was no need to observe the normal protocols between king and subject.

Clearly, Clayde desired to pull Linley closer to him.

And all of the nobles of the Kingdom of Fenlai knew that if Linley were willing, he could probably easily become a Vicar of the Radiant Church. In a few dozen years, it would be quite natural for Linley to become a Cardinal.

The status of a Cardinal was even higher than that of the King!

"Can't force her." Nimitz felt a headache coming. He was worried that Alice would refuse. He pondered things from Linley's point of view.

Alice was, after all, previously Linley's first love! If he, Nimitz, were to force Alice to meet Merritt, and she were to lose her chastity, how could Linley not explode with rage?

Within the Debs clan's manor.

The clan hall was filled with many members of the Debs clan. Alice and Rowling were there as well. All of them were awaiting the return of Nimitz.

They were all worrying about the future of the Debs clan!

"Second Uncle is back! Second Uncle is back!" A middle-aged man standing in the doorway saw Nimitz and began to call out.

Instantly, all of the members of the Debs clan rushed out towards Nimitz en masse. Alice and Rowling exchanged glances, then rose and went to welcome him as well.

"Second Uncle, what's the situation?"

Nimitz looked at the group of people in front of him. Squeezing out a smile, he said, "The situation isn't too bad yet. Everyone, go back to your residences. Alice, stay. I need to talk to you."

Within the clan, Nimitz had a great deal of authority. Hearing his words, everyone departed.

Alice was somewhat confused, confused as to what Nimitz wanted to talk to her about.

"Big sister Alice, I'll go back to my room now." Rowling waved towards Alice and said in a quiet voice. A short period of time later, the person left in the hall was Alice.

Nimitz stepped into the hall.

"Second Granduncle, what's wrong?" Alice stuttered.

Nimitz looked at Alice. Suddenly, he smiled warmly towards her. "Alice, don't be nervous. Sit down first. Let's have a good talk." As he spoke, Nimitz sat down as well.

Why was Nimitz, who previously was so stern to her, who seemed to always look down on her, being so warm to her now?

Alice couldn't help but feel suspicious.

"Come, sit." Nimitz's smile was so kind, so warm.

Alice nervously sat down.

Nimitz let out a long breath. Worry appeared between his brows. "Alice, we didn't expect that this would happen so soon after you and Kalan got engaged. I don't know who is secretly framing our Debs clan. If I did, I would kill him." A baleful aura appeared on Nimitz's face, but then it transformed into a look of helplessness. "But right now, the most important thing is to cleanse this stain from our name, and rescue Kalan and Bernard."

Alice nodded.

But in her heart, Alice was suspicious. "Why is Second Granduncle saying these things to me?"

Staring at Alice, Nimitz said with sincerity, "Alice, there is something I must beg of you."

"Beg me?" Alice was so startled, she rose to her feet.

Such as Nimitz's standing within the clan that even the clan leader would be respectful to him. But now, Nimitz was saying that he had to beg her to do something. How could Alice not be shocked?

"Alice, Lord Merritt is in charge of investigating this allegation that the Debs clan was engaged in the smuggling of water jade. Lord Merritt is very intrigued by you and wants to meet with you privately."

Nimitz said urgently to her, "Alice, this is a rare, wonderful opportunity to improve our relationship with him. Only by managing to have a good relationship with Lord Merritt would you be able to help our clan. Alice, you grew up alongside Kalan. You don't want to see him in jail either, right?"

Alice was stunned.

A private meeting?

Alice was someone who had lived in a noble clan as well, and knew all too well about the shameful things which occurred amongst the nobility. She instantly could guess that this meeting with Lord Merritt would be more than a simple meeting.

"I...I..." Alice stuttered.

Nimitz begged, "Alice, our entire Debs clan is relying on you. I can even guarantee that so long as you can pull Lord Merritt to our side, you will be Kalan's principal wife."

Alice felt as though her mind was in shambles.

Alice was still pure and chaste of body.

She had refused to cross that last barrier with both Linley and Kalan. Even after getting engaged to Kalan, Alice still insisted on being married before she would enter the bridal bed with him.

But now she had to go deal with Lord Merritt...

"Alice, I'm begging you." Nimitz gritted his teeth, leaving his chair and falling to his knees before her. "Alice, Kalan's life is in your hands."

"Kalan's life?" Alice trembled.

Kalan had grown up alongside her. In recent days, in the face of ridicule and scorn from the other members of the Debs clan, it had been Kalan who protected her.

"Alright. I agree." Alice gritted her teeth.

A look of surprised joy appeared on Nimitz's face, then he hurriedly said, "Wonderful. How about this. Tomorrow at dusk, I'll arrange for you to be brought to Lord Merritt's manor."

But right now, Alice's face was extremely pale. She didn't respond at all.

That next evening. Escorted by twelve knights, a carriage departed from the Debs clan's manor, slowly rolling towards the manor of Lord Merritt. Within the carriage was only one person. Alice.

Alice quietly sat within the carriage, chewing on her lips. Her nervous hands were tightly gripping her dress.

The carriage continued to roll forward. Quite soon, it arrived at the main gate to Lord Merritt's manor.

"Miss Alice, we're here." The voice of the carriage driver rang out from outside.

Hearing his words, Alice's heart trembled. Her right hand drifted down to her waist. The firmness of the steel dagger by her side helped to slightly calm her mind down.

Taking a deep breath, Alice pushed open the carriage to the door and stepped out.

Within the welcoming hall of Lord Merritt's manor.

Wearing a jacket on top and a skirt beneath, Alice was dressed relatively conservatively. Step by step, Alice managed to enter the hall relatively calmly. Alice looked around her, but saw nobody there within the hall.

"Hrm?" Alice couldn't help but frown.

Just at this moment, a female attendant ran over. Respectfully, she said, "Miss Alice, the Lord Duke is in his study and would like to invite you there as well."

"His study?" Alice shuddered slightly.

But under the urging gaze of the attendant, Alice still began to walk forwards with her.

The study was in a very quiet, secluded area. There were very few people here. Arriving at the door to the study, Alice saw a seemingly middle-aged, golden-haired man standing in front of a study desk, staring at some papers.

"This is Merritt?" Seeing Merritt, Alice's first impression was that this was a very fierce person. Even when he sat down at his desk, his back was ramrod straight, and his eyes were sharp.

"Lord Duke, Miss Alice has arrived." That female attendant said respectfully.

Only now did Merritt raise his head. Seeing Alice, he excitedly rose to his feet. "Haha, Miss Alice, you came? I've waited for quite a long time. Come, Miss Alice, please sit." As he spoke, he left his seat and walked towards Alice.

Alice stepped into the study.

Alice looked around her. Towards the right side of the study, there were many bookshelves, covered with countless books. On the left side of the study, there was a bed.

"Often, when I'm reading or taking care of government affairs, I'll get tired and will rest there." Duke Merritt said with a smile. At the same time, he walked towards the study door and shut it.

Seeing the door to the study shut, leaving behind only her and Merritt in the room, Alice grew nervous.

“Lord Merritt, it’s better if we leave the door to the study open. I’m not accustomed to dark environments.” Alice hurriedly said.

Chapter 16

As he closed the door to the study, Merritt heard Alice’s words. He couldn’t help but turn to Alice with a smile. “Miss Alice, we’re going to discuss the affairs of the Debs clan. We can’t discuss those openly and publicly, can we? If his Majesty were to find out, then I would be in serious trouble. You should know that I’m taking on serious risks on behalf of your Debs clan. Best we leave the door closed.”

Alice was stunned.

In terms of wordplay, how could Alice match this Lord Merritt, who had engaged in the highest levels of court intrigue for so long?

Smiling, Merritt walked past her. In front of the bookshelf, there were two chairs around a round table. Merritt would often chat with some of his friends here.

Merritt first sat down, then looked at Alice. “Alice, you should sit.”

“Thank you, Lord Merritt.” Alice secretly let out a sigh of relief, then sat down on the opposite chair. The thing which made Alice the most nervous in this study was that bed.

“Please wait a moment.”

Smiling, Merritt rose to his feet, then pulled out a bottle of red wine and two wine cups. He poured himself and Alice a cup of wine each.

“Alice, this is the Bluerain red wine from the Yulan Empire, a sixty-year old vintage. The flavor isn’t bad. Have a taste.” Merritt smiled as he raised his glass to her.

Alice was somewhat afraid that some sort of knockout drug had been mixed into the wine. But, under Merritt’s gaze, Alice was forced to raise her own glass as well. Only, she just barely touched the wine with her lips.

Merritt didn’t force her. Changing the topic, he said, “Alice, you and Kalan have already become engaged. I expect you know quite a bit about the affairs of the Debs clan. Did you know they were engaged in smuggling?”

“No, I didn’t. I think Kalan wouldn’t engage in smuggling.” Alice hurriedly said.
“Lord Merritt, the Debs clan is quite powerful. I think they wouldn’t engage in this smuggling business.”

With a smile that wasn’t a smile, Merritt looked at Alice. “Hard to say.”

“Ah!”

Merritt seemed to have seen something, and all of a sudden, he moved next to Alice, so close that his face was mere centimeters away from Alice’s face.

Startled, Alice hurriedly retreated.

“Don’t move.” Merritt’s shouted carried a hint of a command.

Born from long years of being accustomed to power, Merritt’s commanding voice froze Alice in her tracks, as ill at ease as she was. Merritt carefully inspected Alice’s hair, then looked down at Alice.

Upon lowering his head, his face was now only a few centimeters away from Alice’s. This made Alice hurriedly bend her head away from him.

Seeing this, Merritt laughed, then returned to his original seat. He let out a helpless sigh. “Just then, I saw a single white hair on your head, but after you moved, I couldn’t see it anymore.”

A strand of white hair?

In her heart, Alice began to grow irritated. She lived together with Rowling now, and every morning, when they were bored, they would comb each other’s hair. Often, she would find some white hairs on Rowling’s head. But Rowling often expressed envy towards Alice, as she could never find white hair on Alice’s head.

Rowling couldn’t find any white hair despite combing Alice’s hair every day. How could Merritt have found any?

But Alice didn’t dare to say this.

“Alice, you are still young. Don’t be too upset. If you are upset, you’ll age faster, and thus have white hair.” Merritt said solicitously.

Alice only quietly listened to him as he spoke.

Merritt nudged his chair in Alice's direction, then fixed his gaze upon Alice. "Alice, you are quite beautiful, you know. Your charm and aura of refinement is really quite mesmerizing to behold."

Alice couldn't help but feel shy and nervous.

Merritt leaned forward slightly, staring intensely at Alice. "Alice. Those wives of mine, all they care about are superficial things like money and glory. They seem so vulgar, so low. But you are totally different. Truly, you are, you know. The very first time I saw you, I was stunned."

"I very much regret that I ended up marrying women such as them." Merritt suddenly reached out and held Alice's hand. Alice's eyes suddenly widened. Merritt continued to look at Alice. "Alice, if I...if I were to tell you that I love you from the bottom of my heart, that I am smitten with you, would you believe me?"

Alice hurriedly stood up...but Merritt maintained his tight grip on her hand.

"Lord Merrit, Lord Merritt. I'm the fiancée of Kalan!" Alice struggled, and only after three attempts was she able to break free from Merritt's grip.

Merritt looked at Alice with a smile. "As you say, you are only a fiancée, which means you aren't married yet. You totally can marry another. As for Kalan, what does a kid like him know about having fun?"

As he spoke, Merritt once more moved nearer to Alice, while Alice continued to move back.

But in her nervousness, Alice didn't notice in the slightest that Merritt was pressuring her into the direction of the bed.

"Alice. I really have fallen for you. I swear!" Merritt stared soulfully at Alice.

Merritt wasn't lying. Over the course of admiring the sculpture 'Awakening From the Dream', and then upon seeing Alice herself, he really did fall for Alice. But this sort of 'falling for' was only a desire to possess.

"Lord Merritt!" Alice was growing frantic.

Suddenly, Alice's back legs collided with the bed. Knocked off balance, Alice fell backwards onto the mattress.

A hint of a smile appeared on Merritt's face. He immediately threw himself on top of Alice, all but pressing his body against hers. "Alice, my goddess, please satisfy the

desires of this mortal who has been mesmerized by you. If you satisfy my desires, I'll satisfy yours as well and clear the unjust stains from the Debs clan."

Clear the stains of the Debs clan?

Staring at Merritt who was right on top of her, Alice couldn't help but suddenly think back to a night she had been with Linley at a small hotel. The two of them had entangled themselves lustfully, but at the very end, she had stopped Linley.

How could she give up her chastity to this man in front of her?

"My goddess, come to me." Merritt's voice was very soft, as though he was trying to hypnotize her.

"No. No!"

Alice suddenly pulled the dagger from her waist and thrust it at Merritt. At the same time, the stones on the floor flew at Merritt.

Alice was an earth-style magus, after all!

But Merritt himself was a powerful warrior. His reflexes were very fast, and he quickly dodged to one side while at the same time slapping the dagger out of Alice's hand.

Alice instantly dodged towards the other side, running for the door.

But with a flicker of his body, Merritt appeared between her and the door. With a smile that was not a smile on his face, he looked at Alice. "Alice. Do you still want to resist? Based on your prowess as a magus and that little knife, you want to resist me?"

"Lord Merritt, let me leave." By now, Alice was firm in her resolve.

"You no longer wish to save the Debs clan? You don't wish to save your fiancé, Kalan?" Merritt asked.

Alice's eyes were determined. Gritting her teeth, she said, "Although I do wish to save them, this is not the way to do it. You beast!"

"Beast?" The expression on Merritt's face changed. He coldly said, "Originally, I wanted for the mood to be a bit more romantic, but since you refuse to cooperate, then I'll show you what a beast really looks like."

Alice's face turned pale.

“Merritt. Don’t go too far.” Frightened, Alice quickly retreated, grabbing the chair next to her and smashing it at Merritt.

With a single fist, Merritt easily broke the chair apart.

“Don’t resist. This place...is my manor.” Merritt said with a soft laugh.

Watching Merritt draw step by step closer to her, Alice gritted her teeth and said wildly, “Merritt! You’d best not forget that I once was Linley’s woman!”

These words halted Merritt in his tracks, stunning him.

Alice really did not want to say these words. She knew that her actions of the past had wounded Linley very deeply, and she didn’t want to have anything more to do with him. But at this point in time, she could think of no other way.

“Linley?” Standing there without moving, Merritt frowned.

Biting her lips, Alice stared at Merritt. “Merritt, I can pretend that nothing at all happened today. But if you go too far, then don’t blame me when I also go all-out afterwards. I trust you know how influential Linley is now.”

Merritt looked at Alice.

He really had been enchanted by Alice, but Merritt knew very well that Linley’s relationship with Alice was very special. Just from looking at that sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, one could tell how deep Linley’s affection for Alice had been.

“Linley’s feelings towards Alice really were in the realm of true love. If Linley were to find out...” Merritt’s head began to hurt.

Linley.

Very hard to deal with!

The current Linley already possessed incredible influence. Although he, Merritt, was powerful, in the end he was only the Right Premier of a single kingdom. To the Radiant Church, perhaps deposing one of the rulers of a kingdom was something it would do only after serious consideration, but they wouldn’t even think twice before dealing with the Right Premier of a kingdom.

All Linley had to do was to ask the Radiant Church for their assistance. Dealing with him, a Right Premier, wouldn’t be a problem.

But in the future, Linley would only be more formidable. This was one of the reasons why not a single member of the nobles of the Kingdom of Fenlai had dared to plot against Linley or make attempts against Linley's life, which was why, in front of Linley, they all behaved so courteously.

"Alas..." Merritt let out a long sigh. "Alice, I really, truly, have fallen for you from the depths of my heart, so much so that I lost my sense of rationality."

Merritt smiled apologetically at Alice. "I apologize. I've come back to my senses now. Since you aren't willing or able to have feelings for me, of course I cannot force myself on."

"Lord Merritt, I'll take my leave, then." Alice quickly scurried to the door, opened it, then rushed out.

Seeing Alice depart, the apologetic look dropped from Merritt's face, and his gaze grew vicious and cold. With a cold sneer, he spat out the word, "Bitch!"

By the time Alice had returned to the Debs clan manor, it was now totally dark.

Right now, all of the members of the Debs clan were in the middle of the main hall, eating dinner. Only, the atmosphere wasn't very good. The clan could be exterminated at any time, after all.

"Alice. You returned?" Rowling suddenly saw Alice running inside.

Nimitz and the others all stood up as well.

"As fast as that?" Nimitz frowned. Alice had come back far too early, much earlier than he had expected.

"Alice, eat dinner with us." Rowling immediately called to her.

On the walkway past the main hall, Alice glanced at the people inside and said apologetically, "I'm not feeling well. I'll go back to my room and rest first." Alice's voice was very low and hoarse.

Rowling felt that Alice wasn't acting normally.

"Let me go see how Alice is doing." Rowling smiled at everyone, then left the hall, leaving behind Nimitz, who was frowning with suspicion.

Alice and Rowling, in their room.

Upon entering the room, Alice had immediately thrown herself into her bed. She could no longer hold back her tears, which poured out. Her heart was filled with wrongs and injustices.

“What did I do wrong? Lord, why must you punish me so?”

Alice was howling with rage in her heart.

“I never asked for much, only that I could have a simple, peaceful life. I want my parents to have a peaceful life, for myself to have a peaceful life. Why, why must you punish me so?” Alice’s heart was filled with misery. True, the Debs clan perhaps was going to be finished.

But what did that have to do with her?

Why did they have to send her to deal with Merritt?

Why did she have to be forced to the point where she had to shout out the words, “I once was Linley’s woman?” How difficult had it been for her to force these words out! Alice truly hadn’t wanted to say that!

“Big sister Alice, what happened?” Rowling ran into the room. Seeing Alice sobbing to the point where there was a huge wet spot on the bed, Rowling grew frantic with worry.

Rowling immediately went over and began to stroke Alice’s back. “Don’t cry, don’t cry. Whatever it is, you can tell me. Tell me.”

Alice immediately turned and threw herself into Rowling’s arms, bawling even more fiercely. It wasn’t as bad without anyone there to comfort her, but now that someone had come, Alice felt all the more aggrieved and wronged.

Rowling comforted Alice for more than half an hour before Alice finally became somewhat calmer.

“Big sister Alice, what exactly happened? Tell me.” Rowling looked at Alice.

Alice took a deep breath, then slowly explained the injustice that had been done to her. “Little Rowling, you are also aware of the current situation with the Debs clan. Yesterday, Second Granduncle came and wanted to have a private chat with me. He wanted me to...”

The more she heard, the more fury Rowling felt.

She was angry at Nimitz's behavior. She was angry for what Alice had suffered. And she felt rage towards that beast-like Merritt's behavior. At the same time, she felt sympathy for Alice.

"I don't want to get involved, get involved anymore. I just want to live out a peaceful life." Alice said, sobbing sporadically.

Over these past few days, Rowling had been considering what the best way to help the Debs clan was. But upon hearing Alice's story, she suddenly understood a few things.

"Big sister Alice, don't be sad. No matter what, you definitely cannot let that Merritt destroy your chastity." Rowling comforted her.

Alice nodded.

"But we still have to come up with a way to save Kalan and the others." Rowling said. "Big brother Kalan is our fiancé, after all."

Alice also wanted to save him, but she didn't know how.

"We still have an option." Rowling looked at Alice. "But...I don't know if you would be willing to take it, sister Alice."

"Rowling..." Looking at Rowling, Alice had already guessed what she was going to say.

Rowling nodded. "Right. Go ask Linley for help. Today, as soon as you mentioned his name, that Merritt no longer dared to touch you. Clearly, Linley is extremely influential. Based on what I know, not only does Linley have a relationship with the Radiant Church, he also has a relationship with the Dawson Conglomerate. Even his Majesty, King Clayde, treats Linley as he would a friend, rather than an ordinary subject. If Linley is willing to speak out, we would have a much greater chance of rescuing big brother Kalan."

Currently, in the Kingdom of Fenlai, without question, people were more willing to defer to Linley than to anyone else.

Even the Left Premier and the Right Premier couldn't compare with him.

Because, as one could easily tell, in the future Linley would be a high level person within the Radiant Church. Even right now, he was viewed as an extremely important potential talent who needed to be cultivated and trained. For the sake of Linley, those two Cardinals of the Radiant Church had even gone to Hogg's funeral

and paid their respects to him. From this, one could easily see how important they viewed Linley as being.

“Big brother Linley?” Alice’s emotions were very mixed.

In truth, in Alice’s heart, she knew this was a possibility long ago, but she didn’t want to confront it. She truly didn’t wish to go beg Linley. She felt that she didn’t have the face to see him again.

She knew that she had wounded Linley too heavily. That moment when she had seen that sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’, Alice understood how deeply Linley loved her. Or at least, how deeply he had once loved her.

She was ashamed to meet him!

“Big sister Alice, I understand your feelings.” Rowling tightly gripped Alice by the hands. “But, big sister Alice, big brother Kalan and his father are very likely to lose their lives. I beg you, please just suffer a bit on our behalf. At least Linley won’t act the way that Merritt did.”

Alice’s heart was filled with pain.

“No face? Is my self-respect more important, or are the lives of big brother Kalan and his father more important?” Alice asked herself this question. She had no other choice.

“Big sister Alice.” Rowling stared beseechingly at Alice.

Alice took a deep breath, forcing herself to calm down. Looking at Rowling, she nodded. “Alright. I’ll go see big brother Linley tomorrow.”

Chapter 17

At the manor of the Prime Court Magus. Within the Hot Springs Garden.

An earthen glow emanated from a patch of grass within the Hot Springs Garden. Earth-style magic – Supergravity Field. Right now, Linley was dressed only in a pair of long pants, his upper body bare as he trained in the grass.

Those muscles on his bare upper body rippled like water. There wasn’t a trace of excess flesh. Right now, Linley’s body, organs, veins, and arteries were all being forced to withstand a gravity four times stronger than normal.

Fortunately, after becoming a Dragonblood Warrior, Linley's body had reached new heights in power.

Linley's legs were arched in a bow-drawing stance, and his two hands were raised parallel by his sides, each holding up a giant boulder. Each of these boulders weighed over a hundred pounds. Under the quadruple gravity field, the two combined weighed nearly a thousand pounds.

His legs as taut as steel cables, Linley's body was as straight as a quill. His gaze, fixed in front of him, didn't waver either.

One drop of sweat after another rolled down Linley's body, covering his entire body in sweat. But Linley persevered....

Despite being designated the Prime Court Magus for the kingdom, Linley continued to train non-stop every day. His guards stood solemnly outside, alongside two female attendants who were ready to answer Linley's call at any moment. The door to the Hot Springs Garden, however, was closed.

Whenever Linley was training, no one was permitted to enter.

Once, his majesty King Clayde, ruler of Fenlai, had come to the manor. The palace attendant ignored the guards at the Hot Springs Garden and charged in directly, instructing Linley to meet with his Majesty. Linley immediately issued an order for that attendant to receive twenty strikes of the military rod. That physically weak attendant ended up being beaten to death.

But afterwards, King Clayde didn't blame Linley in the slightest. On the contrary, he berated his subordinates, telling them that while at the Hot Springs Garden, they absolutely must obey Linley's rules.

"Lord Linley always is so hard-working when he trains. He's spent an entire day in there. When he's not engaging in warrior training, he is engaging in magus training. I think the only time he ever rests is the time he spends in his stonemasonry." One female attendant said in a low voice. The other female attendant also nodded. "I've never seen such a hard-working noble before. In the previous household I worked for, the instructor for the warriors himself only spent four hours a day training."

The nearby guardian knights of the Radiant Church also felt a great deal of admiration for Linley. Most geniuses, after their initial glory, would begin to fall behind. Each year, the Radiant Church would train a good number of geniuses. However, not only were none of those geniuses as outstanding as Linley, once their status had risen, they would become totally distracted by the material pleasures of the world and fall behind.

“If Lord Linley continues like this, in all likelihood, he will be the youngest combatant of the ninth rank in history, and the youngest Saint-level in history as well.” One of the guardian knights said softly.

The other guardian knight also nodded.

All of these people very much admired Linley’s painstaking diligence in training.

Only....“Lord Linley is a bit too strict and severe.” One of the female attendants said in an unhappy voice.

In their hearts, Linley was handsome, young, had high standards for himself, and powerful. He had a future! A person like him could be considered to be all but perfect. Only, he was extremely severe towards others. Even when dealing with female servants like them, he didn’t act with any gentleness or affection.

What these people didn’t know was that although Linley did engage in stonesculpting, he wasn’t really resting; when he was stonesculpting, he was increasing his spiritual energy at the fastest rate possible! Linley’s was increasing his power at every moment!

Within the Hot Springs Garden.

“Whew.”

An hour of warrior’s training had come to an end. Linley began to activate the Dragonblood battle-qi in his body, and that tired, weary feeling disappeared. From a nearby box, Linley withdrew a straight chisel, then walked over to one of those two boulders he had dropped onto the grass. These were used by Linley when stonesculpting.

Staring at these boulders and their internal lines and structure, Linley began to mentally design a sculpture. In the blink of an eye, a mental image of a warrior’s face was formed.

A hint of a smile on his face, the straight chisel in Linley’s hand began to move.

In a very rhythmic pattern, the straight chisel flew and chopped about, causing shattered bits of stone to fly everywhere. Linley knew exactly what he was doing, and so each chop was made with absolute confidence, and the strength he used was just right.

What a wonderful feeling!

Linley's spirit became submerged within the ebbs and vibrations of the surrounding earth elemental essence, allowing him to sense the lines and cracks of the stone. Linley's spirit also submerged into the surrounding wind elemental essence, allowing every single stroke of the knife to reach the peak of perfection in accuracy.

Nature!

Linley's soul had become one with nature, and like a benevolent mother, nature surrounded Linley's soul, allowing it to grow, to strengthen.

"Whew."

Letting out a breath, Linley withdrew his straight chisel.

After spending two hours, this giant boulder had been transformed into a rough outline. As for the fine details, Linley planned to finish those tomorrow. Every day, Linley set limits on how much time he could spend on his stonesculpting.

He had to use the right complement of training regimes to achieve the maximum effect in terms of raising his power!

Training started every day at five in the morning, while now, it was eight o'clock. It was time for Linley to eat breakfast.

Putting down his straight chisel, Linley stepped out of his pants and into the hot springs pool. Lying within the hot springs, feeling the hot springs water rush against his muscles, Linley closed his eyes comfortably, finally allowing himself some time to rest.

"Enter." Linley suddenly shouted.

Those two female attendants who had been quietly standing outside the door this entire time immediately entered with two trays. Those round trays were covered with all sorts of delicacies and fruits.

"Lord Linley." Those two female attendants put the two round trays down on the nearby table, then respectfully awaited Linley's commands.

While obediently standing to the side, those two female attendants couldn't help but sneak peeks at Linley. Linley's naked, muscular, reclining male body was indeed a source of fascination to them.

"You can go for now."

Linley said calmly.

"Yes, milord." The two female attendants immediately left respectfully.

From start to finish, Linley had not glanced at them even once.

Next, Linley stepped out of the pool, put on a set of clean underwear and clothes, then sat on a chair and began to eat breakfast.

"Swish." A black shadow rushed out from the faraway grassy fields. It was Bebe. Before this, when Linley was training and stonesculpting, Bebe was napping.

"Boss, it's time for breakfast, eh? Alright, this big piece of roast meat is mine." Bebe's eyes instantly were drawn to a particular large piece of roasted magical beast meat."

Linley chuckled.

"Grandpa Doehring, do we really have no method available to us to deal with that Clayde at present?" Linley mentally said to Doehring Cowart.

Doehring Cowart flew out of the Coiling Dragon ring. Seating himself on another chair, he smiled at Linley. "Linley. Clayde is a warrior of the ninth rank. The gap between the two of you is too vast. Even if you assume the complete Dragonform, you are only a warrior of the early-stage eighth rank. Oh, wait, now that you are currently a late-stage warrior of the sixth rank, when you assume the Dragonform, you can be considered to be a late-stage warrior of the eighth rank. But nonetheless, you are far from being a match for Clayde."

Linley felt very unwilling to accept this. He knew, now, that the person who had instructed his mother to be abducted by Duke Patterson was King Clayde. But right now, he had no chance of dealing with Clayde at all.

"The only choice I have is to continue training hard." Linley unconsciously balled his fists, with the fork in his hands warping from his strength.

In the early ranks, the extra boost provided by the Dragonform transformation was especially large. As a warrior of the late-stage sixth rank, based on his current training regime, in about half a year, there was hope for Linley to reach the seventh rank. Upon reaching the seventh rank of power, when using the Dragonform, Linley would be able to step into the early-stage ninth rank.

"Lord Linley." The voice of a female attendant could be heard from outside.

"Come in." Linley said calmly.

Only now did the female attendant rush in. Respectfully, she said, "Lord Linley, outside, there's a young lady named Alice who wishes to meet you."

"Alice?" Linley's eyelids flickered. He looked at the female attendant. "Bring her to the guest hall. I will be there shortly." Linley stood up as he spoke.

"Yes, Lord Linley." The female attendant didn't dare to tease Linley in the slightest. They all knew how legendarily severe Linley was with his subordinates.

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Alice was clutching a glass of water, seeming very ill at ease. For her to come beg Linley was asking a lot of her. But she had no other choice.

Footsteps could be heard.

Alice's entire body shook, and she immediately turned her head to look.

Dressed in a loose, long robe, Linley smiled as he entered from an inner hall. Seeing Alice look at him, he immediately nodded and smiled back. "Alice, long time no see." As he spoke, Linley sat down at the host's seat.

Alice could clearly feel that Linley's attitude was now totally different from a year ago. A year ago, Linley was still very young and immature.

But now, Linley carried himself with the unconscious noble grace and poise. Just from that faint smile, one could sense his grandeur, a grandeur which only came from someone being assured of his high status.

"Big brother Linley." Alice forced her voice to sound calm, but even despite that, her voice still trembled slightly.

"Would you like to eat some fruit? I remember that you loved to eat olives." Linley glanced at one of his female attendants.

A short time later, the female attendant returned with a plate of fruit.

"Thank you." Alice picked up an olive and took a small bite. At this moment, Alice couldn't help but think back to when she and Linley had eaten olives together. Back then, Linley had fed them to her.

Alice couldn't help but turn to look up at Linley, only to find that Linley was smiling at her.

"Big brother Linley." Alice put down the fruit, looking at Linley. "There's something I want to ask your help with."

"You need my help?" Linley had already guessed at the reason behind this visit of Alice's.

"Go ahead." Linley said directly.

Alice took a deep breath, then looked at Linley seriously. "Big brother Linley, you already know about what is happening with Kalan's clan. I think...Kalan and the others are innocent. I hope you, big brother Linley, can help them and say a few words on their behalf to his Majesty. I hope you can wash away these unjust accusations and return their innocence to them. I know that his Majesty will definitely give you face."

Linley couldn't help but laugh helplessly.

Innocence?

Others might not be aware, but how could he, who had killed Patterson, be unaware? When he had killed Patterson, Patterson had personally told him about this smuggling affair. There was an 80% to 90% chance that this was with regards to the Debs clan!

"Wash away these unjust accusations? Why do you believe they are innocent? Alice, how much do you really know about the Debs clan?" Linley looked at Alice.

Alice was startled.

It had taken her a tremendous amount of courage to force out those words just now. But after Linley answered her with a question, she had a feeling...that Linley wasn't going to help!

She suddenly wanted to cry. She felt extremely miserable.

Alice stood up. Curtseying towards Linley, she said, "Big brother Linley, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here today. I know that in the past, I hurt you very deeply. For me to come now and ask you to help save the Debs clan is really excessive of me. It's okay if you don't help. I won't blame you." As Alice saw it, Linley and Kalan were rivals in love. It was already very kind of Linley not to throw more stones in the drying well, to kick him when he was down.

As he looked at Alice, Linley's heart was very calm

With regards to his failed relationship with his first love, Linley now regarded it only as a bygone dream. The current Linley had already experienced the battle in the Foggy Valley, the transformation into a Dragonblood Warrior, and the death of his father. And now, he had embarked on a dark road of vengeance!

On the road to vengeance, the thing which Linley had to do was to suppress himself, to be cruel, to be cold, to not slacken in the slightest. The current Linley was, mentally, far stronger than he had been a year ago, and far more mature as well. That young, naïve Linley of a year ago couldn't compare at all to the current Linley. He also wasn't the Linley that Alice thought he was.

After having experienced so much, he had matured! Linley had experienced far too much!

"Big brother Linley, I'll leave now." Alice immediately stood to leave, her tears at the precipice of coming out.

"Alice." Linley stood up as well, stretching his hand out and resting it against Alice's shoulders.

Alice turned her head to stare at Linley in amazement. Linley was gazing at her. In a serious voice, he said, "Alice, there's so much that you don't know. Whether or not the Debs clan is innocent isn't something that you can determine. However, since you made up your mind to come ask me for help, I won't just stand by and watch. But...whether or not I'll be able to succeed in saving them is another question."

Chapter 18

Alice felt her heart suddenly tremble. A warm feeling suddenly rushed into her heart, a sensation of thankfulness mixed with a boundless regret.

"Big brother Linley, thank you. Thank you." Alice couldn't help but repeat herself. Her tears were already beginning to shimmer in her eyes. The tears of excitement.

Linley smiled. "Go back. This afternoon, I'll pay a visit to his Majesty at his palace."

Linley could feel that right now, his heart was very calm when he saw Alice. When seeing Alice, all he was seeing was a female friend whom he was on good terms with. Nothing more.

"Alright. Thank you." Alice glanced at Linley one more time, then turned her head and left, her thoughts extremely complicated.

Originally, Alice was afraid that because in the past, she had hurt Linley, Linley would feel hatred for Kalan, which would cause Linley not to help save Kalan. But Linley's reaction had been totally out of her expectations. Linley wasn't agitated at all. He was very calm.

Watching Alice's departing back, Linley sat down. Grabbing a fruit, he began to casually eat it. At this time, Bebe popped out as well.

"Boss, you're gonna help that Alice? If it were me, I would've kicked her out long ago. Heck, it's enough that you didn't just slap her to death with one palm!" Bebe said unhappily.

Linley glanced at Bebe. "Bebe, humans aren't magical beasts."

At this time, Doehring Cowart flew out of the Coiling Dragon ring. Looking at Linley with an approving gaze, he said, "Linley, you performed very well. I was a bit worried that you'd have a child's temper and shoo her away, throwing another stone into a drying well."

"A child's temper?" Linley was startled.

In Doehring Cowart's eyes, such behavior was indeed that of a child.

"That's right. Women, psh. They are all over the place." Doehring Cowart chuckled.

Linley was instantly speechless. He was very much not in favor of Doehring Cowart's viewpoint on women, which was rather similar to the viewpoints of Yale and Reynolds.

"Alright, enough chat. I need to continue my training." Linley immediately rose and returned to the Hot Springs Garden.

As far as Linley was considered, Alice was nothing more than a side-episode, incapable of affecting his mood. Right now, the only thing Linley cared about was...avenging his father.

.....

"His Majesty is in his study, laboring over affairs of state. Lord Linley, please come with me to the study." The palace attendant said respectfully.

Linley nodded.

Bebe standing on his shoulders, Linley followed the attendant towards the study. After a while, they finally arrived.

"Your Majesty! Lord Linley has arrived!" The palace attendant called out loudly from outside the door to the study.

Clayde, who had been absorbed in reading some texts, raised his head. When his tiger-like gaze landed upon Linley, his eyes shone excitedly. Laughing loudly, he said, "Linley, quick, come in. There's no need for the two of us to stand on so much ceremony."

"Yes, your Majesty." Linley laughed faintly as he entered the study. Clayde, in Linley's eyes, really was a bold, straightforward man, and was incredibly polite when interacting with Linley, never using his position as the king to try and bully him.

"If it wasn't for my father's death," Linley mused to himself, "Perhaps you and I would've become friends. But there will come a day where I must kill you. Right now, the only thing I am lacking is an opportunity." Linley had never hesitated in his determination to kill Clayde.

As soon as he had the opportunity, he would definitely kill him.

Clayde clinked wine cups with Linley in a toast, took a sip, then said, "Linley. It is quite rare that you voluntarily come pay a visit to the palace. What business do you, my Prime Court Magus, have to discuss with me today?"

Linley chuckled.

The Prime Court Magus actually had quite a few responsibilities, but Linley had never undertaken any of them. He allowed the other court magi to assume many of the responsibilities, and Clayde had never given him any pressure. After all, Linley was only a servant of the Kingdom of Fenlai in name. All he was doing...was showing that he, Linley, considered himself to be on Clayde's side.

"It's true that I came here today to discuss something." Linley smiled as he looked at Clayde. "With the Debs clan under suspicion of smuggling water jade, your Majesty ordered that Kalan and Bernard be seized, right?"

"That is so." Clayde frowned as he looked at Linley. "What, you've also come to speak on their behalf?"

Over this period of time, quite a few nobles had come to speak on behalf of the Debs clan. The reason they had done this was because the Debs clan had made use of their fortune.

"If you really want to save their clan, I can indeed give you face." Clayde said forthrightly.

The only thing Clayde really wanted to do was to break the power structure that had been erected by his younger brother Patterson. As for the Debs clan, he was going to dispose of them just as a matter of course. He was totally willing to pardon the Debs clan in exchange for Linley now owing him a favor. After all, even if he were to pardon the Debs clan, he could also squeeze them for quite a hefty price in the process.

"No." Linley only shook his head. "I haven't come to speak on their behalf."

"What?" Clayde looked curiously at Linley.

Linley said casually, "Your Majesty, the question of whether or not the Debs clan engaged in the smuggling of water jade naturally has to be handled in a fair, aboveboard manner."

"Oh?" Clayde looked questioningly at Linley. "Then Linley, the reason you came today was because..."

Linley laughed. "I'm thinking that it's enough for you to have seized the clan leader, Bernard, due to your suspicion that the Debs clan engaged in the smuggling of water jade. As for his son, there's no need to seize him. After all, what's the point of seizing a successor? If you seize the first one, they'll still have a second one. As long as their clan isn't exterminated, someone will continue the line."

"Linley, you mean to say..." Clayde looked at Linley.

Linley looked back at Clayde. "Your Majesty, I hope you can release Kalan."

"Oh, release Kalan. I heard that you and Kalan..." Clayde had done a very thorough investigation on Linley. Naturally, he knew of the complicated history between Linley, Kalan, and Alice.

Linley let out a helpless laugh. "Your Majesty, that was a long time ago."

Clayde reminded him, "Linley, I must remind you that based on my investigations, this Kalan fellow is a very vicious, narrow-minded person who can hold a grudge."

"I know." Linley nodded slightly.

Based on the few interactions he had with Kalan, Linley had already sensed that Kalan viewed him with hostility. And...Linley knew that during the seven day

exhibition of his sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', someone had desired to destroy it.

Destroying a sculpture was an act which benefited nobody.

Aside from Kalan, Linley couldn't think of anyone else who would want to destroy 'Awakening From the Dream'.

"Then why do you help him?" Clayde continued.

"Your Majesty. Do you believe a narrow-minded man of limited vision such as him is someone I would be concerned about?" Smiling, Linley looked at Clayde. Clayde blinked, then laughed as well.

"Right. In the past, it could be said that you and Kalan were old acquaintances. But now, not only does he not wish to befriend you, he even harbors enmity towards you. It is his father who continues to try and befriend you. Compared to his father, Kalan's vision really is very limited." Clayde laughed loudly.

Clayde patted Linley on the shoulders. "Don't worry. I'll instruct Merritt to handle this case fairly and to investigate everything thoroughly. The Debs clan definitely won't suffer any injustice. But if the Debs clan really was guilty of smuggling water jade, I won't allow them to escape punishment either." "Right. Handle the case fairly." Linley nodded.

On the way back home in the carriage, Bebe was lying atop of Linley's thighs.

"Wow, Boss, you are so evil. The leader of the Debs clan definitely engaged in smuggling. Later on, his clan will be finished. Even if Kalan is able to escape for now, in the future, he'll still be in terrible straits!" Bebe said excitedly.

Bebe had wanted to destroy Kalan a long time ago. Linley shook his head with a laugh. "Whether or not the Debs clan really will be finished is hard to say. For example, they could give the majority of their clan's fortune directly to King Clayde, and perhaps Clayde would give them a way out. But no matter what, now that they've fallen into Clayde's hands, even if they don't die, they'll lose several layers of skin and flesh."

Linley fully understood how dark the world of nobles could be. Although on the surface, they talked about handling things fairly, that was nothing more than a sham. "Compared to Clayde, the Debs clan is too weak." Linley shook his head.

That puny little Kalan was someone Linley had never worried about. Kalan simply wasn't even close to being on the same level as Linley. The one Linley wanted to deal with was Clayde!

"Milord, we have arrived." The driver said respectfully.

Linley pushed open the carriage door and stepped out. With a leap, Bebe hopped onto Linley's shoulders again. Just as Linley was about to enter his manor, a gate guard said respectfully, "Lord, a guest just came by. He's currently in the main hall waiting for you."

"A guest? In the main hall?" Linley felt suspicious.

There often would be nobles coming to visit Linley, but without his permission to come in, all of them would quietly wait outside. Only people with a very high status, such as Duke Patterson or King Clayde, or Cardinal Guillermo, would directly head to the main hall, instead of waiting outside.

"Who is it?" Linley couldn't help but ask.

"No clue, but in his hands, he was holding the medal of a Cardinal." The guard said respectfully. As a Knight of the Radiant Church, he was very familiar with the insignias of the Cardinals.

Each Cardinal only had a single medal. Naturally, some extremely powerful Ascetics had medals as well. Possession of a medal implied a certain status, representing that this person's position was no less than that of a Cardinal.

"An insignia?" Linley was startled.

Without hesitating at all, Linley immediately went towards the main hall. By the time Linley passed through the walkway and reached the main hall, he was shocked by who he saw.

Within the main hall was a middle-aged, black-haired man wearing a long, loose robe. Judging from appearances, he was in his thirties or forties. He gave off an indolent, lazy aura.

When Linley saw this middle-aged man, that middle-aged man seemed to sense him as well. He immediately looked over towards Linley, a look of excitement in his eyes. "Master Linley, you came?"

"Master Linley?" Linley's mind was full of questions, but he quickly entered the main hall.

"You are...oh, I remember now. You were that one who made the bid of ten million gold coins." Linley remembered now. During the sculpture auction of 'Awakening From the Dream', this middle aged man was the one who had bid ten million.

The middle-aged man nodded excitedly. "I didn't expect Master Linley to remember me. This makes me so excited. Oh, right. Let me introduce myself. My name is...Cesar [Xi'sai]."

"Cesar?" Linley had never heard this name before.

"Cesar?!" Doehring Cowart's voice suddenly boomed out in Linley's mind. "I didn't imagine that little freak Cesar would still remain on this plane, in the Yulan continent."

Linley was startled.

Grandpa Doehring knew this Cesar? Grandpa Doehring was from a long gone era! If he knew this man, then how old would this Cesar be?

"Linley, this Cesar is a total freak. His rate of improvement in strength is extremely fast, and he kills without blinking. When I was alive, he had already entered the Saint-level. Although back then, he was only an early-stage Saint-level, after five thousand years, based on his rate of improvement, he is most likely far more powerful now."

Linley's heart clenched.

The man in front of him appeared to be only thirty or forty, but was actually already a Saint-level combatant during Doehring Cowart's era. Doehring Cowart had only lived for a thousand years before dying, but this Cesar, if one were to count accurately, had been alive for nearly six thousand years now.

A six thousand year old freak!

"Master Linley, what is it?" Cesar said with concern. "Your face seems to have a rather unpleasant look."

"Nothing, Mr. Cesar. Please, sit." Linley forcibly calmed himself down, but whenever he thought of who this person in front of him was, he couldn't help but be stunned.

A six thousand year old freak, a super-combatant who had survived from the era of the Pouant Empire until the modern era. He had already been a Saint-level combatant back then. And now?

“Master Linley, I am very much in awe of your sculpting skills. If it weren’t for the fact that Delia, that little girl, begged me, that day I definitely would’ve bought your sculpture.” Cesar pursed his lips as he spoke, but then his eyes lit up. “So Master Linley, when are you and that Delia girl getting married?”

“Married?”

No matter how stunned Linley had been by Cesar, upon hearing these words, Linley’s eyes bulged out of his sockets as he stared speechlessly at Cesar.

Chapter 19

Cesar stared at Linley suspiciously. “What? Can it be that the little girl of the Leon clan isn’t your fiancée?”

“Fiancée?” Linley mouthed the words.

Seeing Linley’s reaction, Cesar seemed to understand something. Laughing, he said, “Haha, how amusing, how amusing! Master Linley, I must say, that little Miss Delia of the Leon clan has spent quite a lot of trouble on your half. She’s spent a lot of time, a lot of effort, and also gold in order to buy that sculpture of yours, ‘Awakening From the Dream’.”

Linley stared questioningly at Cesar. “Mr. Cesar, can you perhaps tell me where you heard that Delia was my fiancée, and that we were going to get married?”

Cesar stroked his goatee. Delightedly, he said, “Mustn’t say, mustn’t say.”

But in his mind, Cesar thought back to the contents of the letter which Delia had her servant deliver to him. He mused to himself, “For a girl to have the courage to act in such a way shows that her feelings towards Linley are genuine. Best I not say anything, lest I end up embarrassing that little girl, Delia.”

Cesar knew that when a girl told him certain things, it would be rather morally wrong for him to spread it to others as well. He, Cesar...was a very principled man.

Linley buried his curiosity. After all, Cesar describing Delia as his fiancée was a small matter. This man in front of him was a six thousand year old freak. This was what mattered.

“Mr. Cesar, for you to be here with one of the medals of the Radiant Church, does that mean you have come to me on the business of the Radiant Church?” Linley intentionally tried to probe the reason the man had come.

Cesar sat down with a dramatic gesture, then shook his head. “The Radiant Church? Don’t lump me in with those fellows from the Radiant Church.”

“Then this medal?” Linley stared questioningly at Cesar.

Cesar casually said, “Oh. It’s from back when I killed that Cardinal. I figured this medal would eventually come in handy, so I took it from his corpse. On occasion, I’d take it out and present it. I’ve got to say, it really has come in handy over the years.”

“Killed a Cardinal, then casually swiped his medal?” Linley’s heart trembled, and he couldn’t help but feel cold.

This Cesar in front of him really was an extremely forceful person.

Doehring Cowart’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind again. “Linley, back when I was alive, Cesar had already entered the Saint-level. At that time, the Radiant Church wasn’t too powerful. After five thousand years, Cesar is definitely at an extremely terrifying level of power. The Radiant Church wouldn’t offend him just because he killed a Cardinal.”

“After all...Cesar is a Saint-level assassination specialist. A Saint-level combatant such as him is far more dangerous than your ordinary Saint-level combatant. What’s more, an assassination specialist, upon reaching the peak of the Saint-level, is even more dangerous.”

After hearing Doehring Cowart’s words, Linley began to understand.

In the past, when he was in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he had encountered assassins as well. Linley knew very well that despite only being of the sixth rank as well, a specially trained assassin of the sixth rank could be far more dangerous than other combatants of the sixth rank.

Because assassins specialized in ‘ambush’ and in ‘one-hit kills’. When they killed someone, they acted with no scruples or honor at all.

Most Saint-level combatants, on the other hand, cared greatly about their personal honor and reputation.

A peak-stage Saint-level combatant who had no shame and who was an assassin possessed terrifying power.

"That's the reason why the Radiant Church has never tried to recover the medal from Cesar. This is also the reason why Cesar is able to live so openly in the Holy Capital, Fenlai City." Doehring Cowart sighed. "This Cesar is really living a rather comfortable life."

Hearing these words from Doehring Cowart, Linley couldn't help but feel admiration for Cesar.

"What, are you afraid?" Cesar saw that Linley had fallen silent. He couldn't help but grin at Linley. "Relax, that was a long time ago. It has been quite a while since I've last killed someone."

Quite a while? How long a period of time was that? Remembering that the man in front of him was a six thousand year old assassin, Linley wasn't too sure.

"I'm fine. I'm just amazed by Mr. Cesar's prowess, that you could kill a Cardinal of the Radiant Church, but still live openly here in the Holy Capital." Linley smiled.

Cesar's eyes lit up, and he clapped Linley on the shoulders, nodding. "Not bad, not bad. You really are a master sculptor; your mental fortitude is far stronger than most others. Despite knowing my power, you aren't frightened in the slightest."

"Master Linley, I've come to pay you a visit because I wish to ask something of you." Cesar looked at Linley, speaking with sincerity.

Linley quickly said, "Mr. Cesar, please speak. As long as it is within my capabilities, I will definitely assist."

But Cesar put on a stern look, saying, "Master Linley, I, Cesar, have always hated owing favors to others. Since I'm asking a favor of you, naturally I will assist you with something as well."

Linley felt joy in his heart.

A favor of an assassin who had reached the Saint-level over five thousand years ago was priceless. In Linley's mind, a thought quickly flashed by – Kill Clayde!

This entire time, Linley had been bitterly trying to come up with a way to deal with Clayde, or perhaps capture and interrogate him. Linley absolutely had to find out what happened to his mother. But in terms of both personal power and total forces available, Clayde was far more powerful than Linley. He had no way at all to deal with Clayde.

But now, Linley had a way.

"If I were to invite this Cesar to go kidnap Clayde, that shouldn't be too hard." Linley began to grow excited. This problem had already vexed him for a long time. It seemed as though he could resolve it now.

"Mr. Cesar, please tell me what you need." Linley said seriously.

Cesar said boldly, "Fine, then I'll just say it outright."

Rubbing his goatee, Cesar's attitude was that of chatting with an old friend. "I don't have too many hobbies. Women, I like. In the past, killing was also a hobby. But after I got bored of killing, I began to take an interest in art. And naturally, I am most infatuated by stonesculpting, that highest of art forms. Master Linley...last time, I felt a great deal of regret for being unable to purchase your sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'. When I went back, I couldn't even sleep well at night. After tossing and turning many times, I decided to come pay a visit to you in person."

"Mr. Cesar, what are you trying to say?" Linley's brow was furrowed.

He had already sold off the sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream'. Delia had been the one to buy it.

"I was hoping to ask you, Master Linley, to help me carve a sculpture." Cesar looked hopefully at Linley.

"Easily done." Linley quickly agreed. Every day, he spent a few hours training himself by carving sculptures. To spend some of that time carving one for Cesar was an easy task.

"I have a few secondary requirements for this sculpture." Cesar stood up, looking a bit embarrassed.

Embarrassed!

Right, this six thousand year old freak seemed a bit embarrassed.

"Mr. Cesar, feel free to explain." Linley looked at Cesar with curiosity.

Cesar chortled. "Master Linley, I hope...this sculpture will be of me, and will capture my unique aura."

"Use you as my model? Your unique aura?" Linley was startled.

Seeing the look on Linley's face, Cesar quickly said, "What, will that be hard?"

“No. That isn’t it.” Linley shook his head, frowning. “Using you as the model is very easy. Having seen you once, it’s easy for me to remember what you look like. I can sculpt you without any problems. But it’s a bit more complicated to imbue the statue with your unique aura as well. This is because every person has a different aura at different times, such as one aura for when they are angry, another when they are happy, still another when they are sad, or wounded, or both angry and sad...”

Cesar immediately laughed. “Easy. The aura I want...is the aura I have when I am at my manliest.”

“Your manliest?” Linley looked questioningly at Cesar. “Mr. Cesar, when do you feel you are at your manliest?”

Linley was beginning to wonder if this six thousand year old freak had some mental problems.

Cesar said confidently, “I believe that I appear manliest when I am killing someone! My nickname is the ‘King of Killers’ for a reason, you know!”

Cesar, the ‘King of Killers’!

This was a very terrifying name in the Yulan continent. Neither the Four Great Empires nor the two major alliances wished to offend this individual. Even the four major assassin’s guilds, if they were forced to nominate the most outstanding person within their ranks, would without question select this person who had dominated the Yulan continent for over five thousand years. Cesar, the ‘King of Killers’.

A peak-stage Saint-level combatant, and specialized in assassination techniques! In terms of the numbers and complexity of assassination techniques he possessed, he had already reached the pinnacle of perfection in this field. Those people who had received some training from Cesar went so far as to say his assassination techniques had reached the field of artistry.

The strongest assassin. The King of Killers!

Although there were quite a few people in the Yulan continent who had become peak-stage Saint-level combatants, such as the Holy Emperor of the Radiant Church, or the Dark Patriarch of the Cult of Shadows, or that Lord Fallen Leaf of the Radiant Church. And of course, the Four Great Empires each had their own peak-stage Saint-levels.

But without question, every single one of these combatants were wary of the King of Killers, Cesar.

Because in terms of assassination, none of them could match him.

The power of the peak-stage Saint-level 'King of Killers' was simply too terrifying. Even the Four Great Empires and the two major alliances held fast to the principle of, 'do not offend him if it is at all possible to avoid doing so', much less the other major clans of the Yulan continent.

Originally, during the auction, Cardinal Lampson and Cardinal Guillermo had been prepared to bid an extremely high price so Linley would feel grateful towards them. But upon seeing Cesar make a bid, they were so scared they no longer dared to bid at all. Even that old servant of the Leon clan, Shaw, had been terrified upon seeing Cesar, the King of Killers. Afterwards, only after Delia had wrote Cesar a letter and obtained his agreement did Delia dare to make another bid.

From this, one could tell how truly formidable this 'King of Killers' was.

Despite him having a medal of a Cardinal for so many years, the Radiant Church had never tried to regain it, and allowed Cesar to use it to deceive others as he pleased without a peep of protest. This was their show of goodwill towards Cesar. As for that Cardinal he had killed, the only thing that could be said was that he died in vain.

"When killing someone?" Linley shook his head. "Mr. Cesar, I've never seen you kill anyone. How would I know what you are like when you kill someone?"

At present, Linley still knew very little regarding the names of the Saint-level combatants of the Yulan continent. Even the world famous 'King of Killers', Cesar, he had never heard of before.

"That's easy. I'll just show you right now what it looks like when I kill someone. Watch carefully." Cesar's attitude instantly changed.

"Wait!" Linley hurriedly shouted out in alarm. "Mr. Cesar, please don't kill anyone in my home."

"Who said I was going to kill someone? I'm just going to show off the way I look when I kill someone, that's all."

Cesar glanced at Linley rather sourly.

Linley laughed awkwardly.

In his heart, he was filled with a great deal of trepidation towards this 'King of Killers', Cesar. When he heard Cesar say he was going to show how he looked upon killing someone, Linley was instantly frightened and wanted to stop him.

"Watch carefully. Pretend my target is that flower vase in front of us." Cesar said calmly.

Cesar's previous attitude had totally changed. He became calm. In the blink of an eye, that lazy, indolent aura of Cesar's totally disappeared, and he became someone without a hint of an aura, without a hint of power, without a hint of emotion.

Cold. Calm.

Linley didn't see anything at all. He only felt the air tremble slightly, and then the flower vase in front of Linley suddenly started to disintegrate, one inch at a time.

Right. As clearly as can be, the flower vase had disintegrated, one inch at a time!

This sensation totally stunned Linley.

"So this is the King of Killers?" In Linley's mind, he firmly memorized this moment. When making his move, Cesar's expression hadn't changed in the slightest. At that moment, Cesar had seemed totally emotionless, and he had coldly stared at everything in the manor. It was as though in his eyes, all life was nothing more a blade of grass.

Killing someone was nothing more than cutting a blade of grass.

But Linley also had the feeling that, when Cesar had made his move, all of his attention had been focused on that flower vase.

As though the entire universe had been reduced to the flower vase, and nothing else had existed.

That strange, bizarre feeling made Linley want to vomit blood.

"Did you see it?" Cesar once more became energetic and animated. Casually sitting down, he crossed his legs and looked up at Linley. "What do you think? Do you agree that I look the manliest at that type of moment? I've relied on this technique to win the hearts of quite a few young ladies, you know."

Chapter 20

Linley firmly etched this scene into his mind.

Faced with Cesar's questions, Linley nodded. "Very charismatic. I've already committed that scene to memory. However, I'm afraid it will be quite difficult for me to make a carving on the same level of 'Awakening From the Dream' again."

A 'Masterpiece' level sculpture appearing in the world was a rare event indeed.

In the past, Linley had been thoroughly heartbroken, and had poured all of his emotions into that carving, allowing himself to forget everything else in the world and attain that most mysterious of states. Only then was he able to complete such a sculpture. For him, in his current state, to attempt to carve another sculpture of that level was virtually impossible.

"As long as you, Master Linley, are the sculptor, I'll be satisfied. I don't ask that it be on the same level as 'Awakening From the Dream', only that it is on the same level as most master level sculptures." Cesar said with a laugh.

Linley nodded.

If that was the case, Linley had total confidence in his abilities.

"Mr. Cesar, how about this. I will produce the sculpture you requested in about a month. What do you say?" Actually, Linley only needed three days, but he wanted to give himself sufficient time.

Cesar nodded. "Alright. One month is a very short period of time. I'm not in a hurry. I have all the time in the world. Haha."

"Master Linley, if you have anything you want me to help with, feel free to tell me. As long as I can accomplish it, I will definitely do it for you." Cesar said magnanimously.

Linley couldn't help but feel rather nervous.

With Patterson killed by him, the only target in Linley's mind now was Clayde. To kill or to capture Clayde wasn't something which Linley was currently capable of.

But Cesar, the King of Killers, definitely was capable!

"Mr. Cesar, if I were to ask you to capture one of the rulers of a kingdom belonging to the Holy Union, would you agree?" Linley resisted the urge to be rash, and instead first sounded Cesar out.

Cesar was startled. He stared questioningly at Linley. "Capture a king?"

Linley nodded heavily. "Yes."

Cesar frowned. After a short pause, he looked at Linley. "How about this. Let me ask you something first. If I were to help you capture this ruler, would you kill him?"

"Most likely!" Linley replied honestly.

Lying to a 'King of Killers' would most likely be quite unwise. As for killing Clayde, if his mother really had died in Clayde's hands, how could Linley not seek vengeance?

Linley had a dark premonition. There had been no trace of his mother for so many years. Most likely, she was dead, or perhaps imprisoned somewhere. No matter what the case, he would seek vengeance for his mother.

"Kill a king?" Cesar looked at Linley.

Linley looked back with hope in his eyes.

In Cesar's heart, he understood that although in terms of status, a Cardinal was somewhat more important than a King, the impact caused by the murder of a King would be greater than that caused by the murder of a Cardinal.

A dead Cardinal could instantly be replaced by the Radiant Church.

But the death of a King would cause countless battles and strife within a kingdom. At the same time, the Radiant Church would yet again be unhappy with him.

"This request of yours...forgive me for being unable to fulfill it." Cesar looked seriously at Linley. "Linley, the impact caused by the murder of a King is too great. And, this entire time, the Radiant Church has treated me quite well. I don't wish to set the Radiant Church and my Sabre organization up as enemies just for the sake of a sculpture."

Behind Cesar, the King of Killers, was the Saber organization, one of the four great assassin's guilds.

Cesar knew what was important and what was not.

A single sculpture wasn't worth allowing cracks to appear in the friendly relationship between himself and the Radiant Church. All these years, the Radiant Church had treated him with courtesy, something Cesar understood in his heart. He couldn't be a selfish wolf who repaid the Church's kindness by acting against one of their kings.

“Change your request.” Cesar said apologetically.

Linley suddenly felt powerless. Perhaps in terms of power, Cesar didn’t care about Clayde at all, but Clayde’s status had convinced Cesar to stay his hand.

Linley forced himself to remain calm.

“Mr. Cesar, I would like to ask, do you have any method by which I, a magus of the seventh rank, can kill a combatant of the ninth rank.” Linley asked.

Cesar glanced at Linley. After a short silence, he said, “I have quite a few assassination methods. But one which would allow a magus of the seventh rank to assassinate a combatant of the ninth rank? This...is challenging.” As he spoke, Cesar began to consider this question. In the mind of this ‘King of Killers’ who hadn’t killed anyone in a long time, one assassination method after another began to speed through his mind.

Linley didn’t dare to disrupt Cesar’s train of thought. He stood there quietly.

Suddenly, Cesar turned to look at Linley. “The combatant of the ninth rank, would this be a warrior or a magus? If this person is a magus, I have a method.”

“Warrior.” Linley immediately said.

Dealing with a warrior and dealing with a magus required totally different methods. Hearing Linley explain that this was a warrior of the ninth rank, Cesar’s head began to hurt.

Linley could only wait there urgently.

“Oh. I have an idea.” Cesar’s eyes suddenly lit up, and he turned to Linley. “Haha, a long time ago, I stumbled upon this method by accident. I didn’t imagine that eight hundred years later, I’d still remember it.”

“What method?” Linley immediately grew excited.

Heavens!

This King of Killers actually had a way for a magus of the seventh rank to kill a warrior of the ninth rank.

“The King of Killers is full of assassination techniques. Indeed, he knows far more than I do in this field. Although, if I lived for five thousand more years, perhaps I would still know more than him.” Doehring Cowart’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind.

Linley couldn't help but force a laugh. Grandpa Doehring never liked admitting inferiority to anyone.

"The method is..." Cesar smiled at Linley. "Using poison!"

"Using poison?"

Linley was startled. He thought it must've been some sort of good method...but a king's food was always tasted and tested. How could using poison be effective?

"Master Linley, don't underestimate the power of poison. The art of using poison is an extremely deep, subtle method of assassination. This world is filled with countless ingredients, which can be used to make countless types of poisons. Who in this world can dare say that he knows all of the poisons in the world? Or that he can detect any sort of poison?"

Linley couldn't help but nod.

He agreed with this. For example, Doehring Cowart knew about using Blueheart Grass to counteract the forceful effects of dragon's blood.

"This poison that I'm talking about was specially designed for use against warriors. As long as the warrior is not at the Saint-level, upon being affected by this poison, his strength will decrease by more than 90%. What's more, to this very day, there's been no antidote invented for this poison. Only by spending a year of time can one slowly use his battle-qi to purge the poison from his system." Cesar clearly had a very clear memory regarding this poison. "And this poison is both odorless and tasteless. There's no way to detect it at all. Only after having been poisoned would one realize that one had ingested it."

Less than 10% of strength would remain? No way to test for it?

Linley's eyes lit up.

Clayde was nothing more than a warrior of the ninth rank. Once he was impacted by this poison, based on Linley's current level of power, wouldn't he be able to easily trample Clayde into the ground?

"Do you have this poison, Mr. Cesar?" Linley quickly asked.

Linley could guess that this poison was extremely rare and valuable. That was without question. A poison which was effective against all warriors short of the Saint-level, and which was odorless, tasteless, and undetectable, would of course rare and precious. If not, all the warriors in the world would be dead already.

“Master Linley, didn’t you hear what I just said? This is something I recalled learning about eight hundred years ago. I just glanced at that recipe back then. After all, this poison was of no use or threat to me.” Cesar frowned. “I only know this poison was primarily formed from eight major ingredients, but I don’t recall the exact ingredients clearly.”

“You don’t remember?” Linley was so frantic, he could kill someone.

Cesar laughed towards Linley. “Master Linley, don’t worry. Although I’m not sure, the recipe for this poison was stored within my organization long ago. I can order some people to make a copy of it and bring it to me. However, the base of my Saber organization is in a place with very few people. From here to there and back, most likely it would take a month or two of time.”

A month or two. That was acceptable!

Linley nodded towards Cesar. “Mr. Cesar, might I ask if your organization has any of this poison already in stock?” Linley didn’t want to waste time looking for ingredients to mix the potion.

“We do not.” Cesar shook his head. “In this entire world, perhaps only the Deathgod’s Hands has this poison in stock.”

“Deathgod’s Hands?”

In the past, while chatting with Yale, the topic of conversation had turned to the four major assassin’s guilds. These were known as Saber, Bloodrose, Scarlet Moon, and Deathgod’s Hands. Each assassin’s guild had its own specialty. The Deathgod’s Hands specialized in using all sorts of queer, exotic assassination techniques.

“Right. In the past, if it weren’t for the fact that the Deathgod’s Hands had a favor to ask of me, perhaps they wouldn’t have given a copy of such a precious recipe to my organization.” Cesar nodded.

Something which could kill virtually any warrior below the Saint-rank. The value of such a poison was unimaginable.

“Then...would it be possible for me to purchase this poison from the Deathgod’s Hands?” Linley said hopefully.

“Impossible.” Cesar laughed. “The Ten Ultimate Poisons of the Deathgod’s Hands is something they never give to any other organizations. The reason they gave us this recipe was probably because they expected that we would never actually use it.”

"Never use it?" Linley looked questioningly at Cesar.

"Because the price is simply too high. It isn't worth it." Cesar chuckled. "Two of the ingredients, in particular, have already been totally cornered off the market by the Deathgod's Hands. The price of the poison would most likely be more than the commission of the assassination mission."

Linley understood.

But to him, no matter how much gold it cost, it would be worth it.

"How about this. I'll go back now, and arrange for some people to deliver a copy of this recipe to you. But Master Linley, a month from now, you need to have my sculpture ready." Cesar laughed as he spoke to Linley.

"Of course." Linley felt a knot in his heart unclench.

After sending off Cesar, Linley, who had been worrying this entire time about how to deal with Clayde, finally relaxed. That night, he finally had a sound rest and a beautiful dream, something very rare for him.

That next afternoon.

Linley was calmly seated cross-legged on the grass, cultivating his Dragonblood battle-qi. That azure-black Dragonblood battle-qi in his body was constantly roiling about, as the unique power of the Dragonblood constantly was drawn deep into Linley's bones, muscles, and tendons, causing his body to become more and more powerful.

Linley believed that if he continued at this rate, there would come the day that his body would be as powerful as that of a real, Saint-level dragon. He would resurrect the fallen glory of the Dragonblood Warriors.

"Lord Linley." A female attendant's voice from outside.

Linley took a deep breath, allowing the Dragonblood battle-qi to return to his dantian.

"Enter." Linley said calmly.

Only then did this serving woman come in. Respectfully, she said, "Lord Linley, there are several guests from the Debs clan outside. They say they have come to thank you, Lord Linley."

"Thank me?" Linley was momentarily stunned.

But then, Linley quickly understood. Clayde had given him face and freed Kalan Debs.

“Thank me? I’m afraid it isn’t as simple as that.” Linley said to himself.

There was a better than 80% to 90% chance that the Debs clan, seeing Linley help out once, had shamelessly come to ask for Linley’s help to save the Debs clan yet again.

“Let them enter.” Knowing of the existence of the poison, Linley now felt much calmer and more assured of himself. With his mind relaxed, he now had the leisure and patience to pay attention to the affairs of the Debs clan.

“The Debs clan? Even if they aren’t exterminated, they’ll be totally beaten down.” Linley could already totally predict the future of the Debs clan.

Within the main hall.

Nimitz was the leader of this delegation. Kalan’s two uncles, Kalan himself, Rowling, and Alice were the members of this six-person delegation. No one in Nimitz’s delegation had dared to sit. They all were standing respectfully.

Seeing Linley walk towards them from afar, Nimitz and the others immediately smiled, and Nimitz even cupped his hands in salute. “Lord Linley!”

“I just finished my training exercises. If you could just wait a moment, I’ll take a quick bath and change my clothes first.” Linley said with a faint smile. And then, no longer paying any attention to the courtesies being paid to him by Nimitz and the others, he headed directly to another room on the other side of the hall.

Nimitz and the others were briefly stunned, but they could only smile and stand there, respectfully awaiting his return.

Chapter 21

Nimitz, Kalan’s two uncles, Kalan himself, Rowling, and Alice didn’t dare to seat themselves with their host absent. They simply waited quietly in the main hall.

“Kalan, when Lord Linley returns, you must remember to be a bit more humble.” Nimitz glared coldly at Kalan.

Kalan nodded. “Second Granduncle, I know.”

In actuality, Kalan's heart was still filled with enmity towards Linley. After knowing the reason why he had been released from jail, he felt even more rage towards Linley!

"I would rather stay in that jail than have Alice go beg him!" Kalan's heart was filled with fury.

In the past, when Linley and Alice had been together, Kalan began to hate Linley. After he took Alice back, he felt a bit smug. In his eyes, although Linley was quite formidable, when compared to his Debs clan, Linley was not even close to being on the same level. But after just a few months, Linley's status had totally changed, becoming the brightest star within the Kingdom of Fenlai at one leap. Even his Majesty the King of Fenlai, and Cardinals of the Radiant Church, treated Linley with warmth. Even his own father acted so humbly towards Linley. All this filled Kalan's heart with even more hatred.

They were both young men. Why was he so inferior?

Especially this time!

He had languished in prison. Although he ended up escaping, it had required Alice, the woman he loved dearest, to go beg Linley to free him.

This caused Kalan to feel humiliated. He very much wanted to not accept Linley's kindness and continue to stay in that jail. How he wished he could angrily curse at Linley, or even kill Linley!

But for the sake of the clan, he, Kalan, had come humbly to Linley's manor, and couldn't even act the slightest bit disrespectfully.

Footsteps could be heard.

Kalan immediately cast aside his angry musings. Forcing a smile onto his face, he made himself appear courteous and modest.

"Forgive me for keeping everyone waiting." Linley's clear voice rang out.

Nimitz and the others all turned to look. Clearly, Linley had just washed. His hair was wet, and he was casually wearing a loose robe.

"You can all sit." Linley comfortably sat down, gesturing casually with one hand.

Nimitz and the others all quickly expressed their thanks, then sat down. Nimitz was the first to smile and say, "Lord Linley, the purpose of our visit this time was to

thank you. If it wasn't for you, Kalan most likely wouldn't have been able to get out this quickly. Kalan, hurry up and thank Lord Linley!"

Kalan was forced to rise to his feet again. Suppressing the anger in his heart, he forced himself to act humbly. "Thank you, Lord Linley."

Linley smiled at Kalan. "Kalan. No need to thank me."

"Mr. Nimitz. Very shortly, I'll have to attend to some important affairs. I don't know if you had any other purposes behind this visit? If you do, I hope you can speak of them now." Linley smiled towards Nimitz.

In truth, Linley simply didn't want to waste any time with these people. His time was meant to be reserved for training.

Nimitz was startled, but then he quickly adjusted. In a low voice, he said, "Lord Linley, our Debs clan has been framed and falsely accused of engaging in the smuggling of water jade. At this point, it's very possible that our Debs clan will be entirely eradicated. Thus, our clan would like to beg you, Lord Linley, for your assistance. Once our clan overcomes this critical threat, we definitely will not forget your great kindness to us."

As he spoke, Nimitz pulled out a black box from his side.

"Lord Linley, this is a very small gift from us to you as our thanks for your rescuing of Kalan. If our clan manages to survive this tribulation safely, we will once again show our gratitude towards you." Nimitz sincerely held out that black box for Linley to look at.

"Swish."

The little Shadowmouse, Bebe, suddenly scurried in front of Nimitz, and actually directly grabbed the box, then jumped onto Linley's legs, planning on opening it up.

"Bebe!" Linley let out a low shout.

Bebe raised his head, staring at Linley unhappily. He didn't open the box, only let out a few 'hmp' sounds, then fell silent.

"Mr. Nimitz, Bebe is rather naughty and mischievous. I'll accept this gift, then, and offer my thanks to you." Laughing, Linley put the black box off to one side, not even glancing at it.

Nimitz could sense that Linley was getting impatient.

Immediately, Nimitz glanced meaningfully at his companions, then was the first to stand up and bow. "Lord Linley, we won't disturb you any further. This case involving our Debs clan will be tried a month from now. I hope that at that time, you can assist us, Lord."

Linley casually nodded.

Nimitz and the others immediately left. That entire time, neither Alice nor Rowling had said a single word. Nimitz was the primary speaker.

Watching the group leave, Linley laughed coldly. "Nimitz, you old scoundrel. Did you think that by bringing Alice, I'd give you more face?" Linley flipped open the cover to the black box. Within it was a magicrystal card and a letter.

"A letter?"

As he toyed with the letter in his hands, a burst of flame suddenly erupted from his palms, incinerating it and turning it to ash. Linley couldn't be bothered reading the letter.

Time passed quickly. September arrived.

This entire past month, Linley had focused on his training. His strength, agility, and other aspects of his body had all improved. The Dragonblood battle-qi in his dantian had become more pure as well.

Linley had the feeling that he had reached the late-stage of the sixth rank.

As far as his growth in spiritual energy, although Linley's advancement rate was extremely rapid, even a genius would normally need around twenty years of training to advance from the seventh rank to the eighth rank. Despite his rapid improvement, a few months of growth wasn't very noticeable.

The path of the magus was indeed a long, difficult one.

Within the Hot Springs Garden, the shadow of a chisel could be seen, and a human-shaped sculpture was become more and more clearly defined. Bits of rubble flew about in every direction, falling onto the grass. Suddenly, Linley came to a halt, withdrawing his chisel.

"Whew. Finally done." Looking at the sculpture in front of him, Linley nodded with satisfaction.

This sculpture, which Linley had named the 'King of Killers', had truly cost Linley a great deal of effort. Each time, Linley had forced himself to totally enter the right state, so as to more perfectly carve out the statue of Cesar making his move.

The statue in front of him was as tall as a person.

Those two cold, calm eyes in particular gave people the sensation of being watched by a god. The aura emanating from this sculpture was the aura of a God of Death. Under the gaze of this sculpture, viewers would unconsciously feel a terrible, cold dread.

"Although this sculpture isn't comparable to 'Awakening From the Dream', it is the most perfect statue that I can make while in a normal state." Linley was extremely satisfied with this sculpture. He had spent an entire month on it, carefully, attentively sculpting. At last, it was completed.

Putting down his straight chisel, Linley soaked for a while in the hot springs, then put on a loose robe and sat on top of a chair. He was eating the breakfast which his attendants had brought him.

"Linley." Doehring Cowart flew out by his side.

"Grandpa Doehring." Linley looked at Doehring Cowart.

Laughing, Doehring Cowart said, "Linley, there's two days left before the trial of the Debs clan's case. Do you plan to go watch?"

"The trial?" Linley was startled.

This month, he had been absorbed in his bitter training. Linley had totally forgotten about everything else, including the Debs clan's case. If it weren't for Doehring Cowart's reminder, Linley probably wouldn't have remembered it at all.

"Yes, of course I'll go." A hint of a smile was on Linley's face.

Year 9999 of the Yulan calendar. September 9th. Within the Blackwater Jail of Fenlai City.

The Blackwater Jail was the most famous jail in the Kingdom of Fenlai, and it was the most securely guarded jail. The cases awaiting trial at the Blackwater Jail were also the most important cases in Fenlai.

Within the Blackwater Jail's courtyard, today there were many nobles congregating. Even his Majesty, King Clayde, had arrived, and was seated to the side, watching. Naturally, Linley came today as well.

"Lord Linley." One noble after another greeted him warmly.

"Linley, come, sit with me." Seated in front, Clayde gestured toward Linley. Linley smiled at Clayde, then walked over.

Linley sat down next to Clayde.

Merritt, his hair gleaming, sat at the judge's seat. His waist and back were ramrod straight. He really did give the impression of being fair and impartial. "Everyone, please sit." Merritt nodded and smiled towards the noble spectators who had gathered here. In particular, Merritt smiled modestly towards the direction of Linley and Clayde.

The noble spectators all sat down quietly. Today, more than ten people had come from the Debs clan. All of them were seated together, nervously watching the proceedings.

"Bring Bernard." Merritt ordered directly.

Very soon, under escort by two soldiers, Bernard was dragged to the court, hands and feet both shackled.

Merritt glanced at a nearby official, who quickly strode forward. In a loud voice, he proclaimed, "Duke Patterson, when he was the Minister of Finance, acted in many ways against the benefit of the kingdom. In particular, he is suspected of colluding with the Debs clan in the smuggling of water jade. The scale of this smuggling operation is larger than any since the founding of our Kingdom of Fenlai. We have already discovered that the valuation of the smuggled water jade was greater than fifty million gold coins!"

In actuality, the Debs clan had just begun their smuggling program. Although the valuation was fifty million gold coins, in reality, the Debs clan had only spent a few million gold coins thus far. From this, one could tell what enormous profits lay in the smuggling trade.

But just as their smuggling activities had begun, Duke Patterson had died, resulting in this being revealed.

The official continued, "Based on our investigations, one of the main organizers of this smuggling activity jumped into the river, while the other two were the brothers Lanseer and Langmuir."

Finishing, the official sat back down.

Merritt looked at Bernard. "Bernard, do you have something to say for yourself?"

Bernard nodded. "Yes, lord, I do. First of all, it was not our Debs clan which engaged in smuggling. Secondly, the Lanseer brothers had been expelled by our clan long ago. Thirdly, the primary mover behind this smuggling operation should've been that person you said jumped into the river. There is no link to our Debs clan at all."

Merritt nodded and laughed. "The organizer of this smuggling operation was your third brother. And you say this has nothing to do with you?"

"Third brother? My third brother is still adventuring in the wilds. How would he have the chance to engage in smuggling?" Bernard continued to insist on this point.

"Your third brother is engaging in adventuring?" Merritt's face grew cold. "Then let me ask you, if your third brother is outside adventuring, then why, despite me ordering your Debs clan to summon him back, hasn't he returned after such a long period of time?"

Bernard said confidently, "My third brother is adventuring in other kingdoms. Most likely, he's travelled too far. It is normal for us to need more than a year to find him."

Merritt glanced at Bernard, chuckled, then said coldly, "Bring in Catson [Ka'te'sen] and the other two."

"Catson?" Bernard was suspicious. Who was Catson and who were the other two?"

Very shortly, three very cowering youths entered the court, falling to their knees immediately as they said respectfully, "Greetings, Lord."

These three youths clearly were peasants who had seen very little of the world before.

Merritt said calmly, "Catson, clearly explain what you saw happen."

"Yes, Lord." The leader of the youths said respectfully. "On June 28th, we three bros were fishing on the river, but suddenly, we saw a richly dressed noble lord clutching onto a dead tree trunk float by us. This noble was covered in blood and had already passed out."

Upon hearing these words, the expression on Bernard's face changed.

"The day that we pursued the leader of the smugglers was June 28th as well. As it just so happened, the leader jumped into the river." Merritt looked at Bernard.

"Bernard, are you willing to admit guilt yet?"

"My third brother is adventuring in distant lands. He definitely wasn't organizing any smuggling activities. My Debs clan is definitely innocent." Bernard still held his head up high and maintained his innocence.

Merritt laughed coldly, then said, "Bring Kanter [Kan'te] Debs."

Hearing the name 'Kanter Debs', the faces of Bernard as well as the members of the Debs clan present all immediately turned white.

Chapter 22

"This Kanter Debs should be that third brother of the Debs clan." Clayde laughed softly towards Linley, and Linley nodded. Linley and Clayde merely watched these proceedings, while the Debs clan's members all felt terror.

All of those viewers from the Debs clan were now so nervous that they were trembling.

"Clatter!"

The sound of shackles rattling could be heard, as under the escort of two soldiers, a thin, ashen-faced, golden-haired middle-aged man entered the court. The gazes of everyone in the court were drawn towards him, including Bernard, Kalan, and Nimitz.

Seeing that golden-haired man appear, Bernard let out a long sigh, then shut his eyes.

"It really is the third brother of the Debs clan, Kanter!" From the watcher's gallery, the sound of discussion could be heard. Many of the nobles present recognized and knew Kanter Debs, due to his position within the Debs clan.

By now, the Debs clan had no further hope of trying to dissemble.

Seated up in the magistrate's chair, Merritt looked towards Clayde, who nodded.

“Bernard.” Merritt looked at Bernard. “As things stand, do you still have something to say for yourself?”

But Bernard didn’t look at Merritt. He turned his head to look at his third brother, Kanter, fixing Kanter with his gaze. Kanter, too, was staring at his elder brother Bernard. The gazes of these two brothers met.

“Third bro, why did you do this?” There was disbelief in Bernard’s eyes, as pain and rage caused his entire body to shake.

“I’m sorry.” Kanter said softly.

Bernard laughed bitterly, then shook his head. In a solemn voice, he said, “It isn’t me you should be sorry to. It’s the entire Debs clan. How many years has the Debs clan existed? It was only thanks to countless generations of hard work and effort by our ancestors that we enjoy our current level of success. But you....you...” Bernard was in so much pain that he couldn’t speak.

“Thud!”

Kanter fell to his knees within the court, and two streams of tears began to flow.

“Big brother, I deserve to die!”

He slapped his face severely with his shackled hands. Crying miserably, he said, “Big brother, I’m sorry. This is all my fault. I was greedy and wasn’t satisfied with that little bit of authority and wealth I had within the Debs clan. That’s why I used the clan’s gold to engage in this smuggling operation. This is all my fault. Big brother! This is all my fault!”

This scene startled everyone present.

Linley and Clayde both raised an eyebrow, while the sentencing magistrate, Merritt, frowned.

“Since things have already developed to this extent...” Bernard raised his head, forcing his tears to stop. He seemed very desolate. “Third bro, it’s no matter a question of whose fault it is. Your actions have caused our entire clan to be in danger of annihilation. I, Bernard Debs, as this generation’s leader of the Debs clan, will not be able to face our ancestors, even in death.”

As he spoke, Bernard’s tears once more began to fall.

Bernard suddenly turned to look at Clayde, kneeling in his direction. Crying miserably, he said, "Your Majesty. It is the greatest misfortune possible for our Debs clan to have given birth to this miserable, petty traitor to the kingdom. As the leader of the Debs clan, I, Bernard Debs, cannot escape responsibility. I, Bernard, am willing to use my death in order to beg you, your Majesty, to spare the Debs clan. After all, the vast majority of people within our clan are innocent!"

Clayde looked at Bernard.

And then he looked at Merritt, nodding once.

Merritt understood Clayde's intentions. Immediately, he called out, "Fifteen minute recess! Fifteen minutes later, we will announce the final sentence!"

.....

All of the nobles present had to leave the court, and could only come back fifteen minutes later. The direction this case was heading towards had become very clear. As for how the Debs clan would be punished for its crime of smuggling, that was totally up to his Majesty.

Such a large-scale smuggling operation could definitely impact the entire clan. Even if the clan was exterminated, it would be understandable.

But of course, Clayde could also be more benevolent and merely punish the Debs clan but allow it to survive.

The result would be entirely up to Clayde.

....

Outside the court, Duke Bonalt was chatting with Linley.

"Linley, did you see that? These main branch descendants of the Debs clan are really quite good. That Kanter had been captured quite a few days ago. But, instead of committing suicide, he waited until today to put on that show just now." Duke Bonalt laughed.

Linley nodded in praise as well.

"If Kanter had killed himself, then the Debs clan would be in an even worse, more passive situation." Linley laughed as well.

If Kanter had committed suicide, then his corpse would have been used as evidence proving the guilt of the Debs clan in engaging in smuggling. The Debs clan would

have had no way to argue against it. But now, Kanter himself was acknowledging that he had acted alone, giving the Debs clan a chance at life.

But of course, whether or not the Debs clan would live was entirely up to his Majesty.

“Kill’em, kill’em all.” Bebe, on Linley’s shoulders, bared his fangs while mentally speaking to Linley. “This Debs clan is too good at playing games. I, Bebe, can’t stomach them.”

Hearing this, Linley couldn’t help but laugh.

“Squeaaaaak.”

The door to the court opened. Fifteen minutes had passed. All of the nobles outside made their way back into the court, all of them quietly assuming their previous positions. Just then, the only people present in the court had been Merritt, King Clayde, and a few other people.

“Linley, take a guess. How do you think I will sentence him?” Clayde smiled towards Linley.

“No clue.” Linley replied succinctly.

Clayde grinned secretively.

“All rise!”

Saying these words, Merritt rose solemnly, and all of the nobles in the court followed his lead. His head raised high, Merritt said in a solemn, clear voice, “This is the sentence of this court: Kanter Debs, a member of the Debs clan, did flagrantly engage in the large-scale smuggling of a huge quantity of water jade, and is therefore sentenced to execution by hanging, with the sentence to be carried out on October 11th.”

“The total value of this smuggling operation was in excess of forty million gold coins. We sentence the Debs clan to receive a punitive fine of double that amount, eighty million gold coins. Bernard Debs is to be released. Court adjourned!” After hearing these words from Merritt, Bernard, Kalan, and Nimitz all let out a sigh of relief, but in their hearts, they felt very helpless.

Eighty million gold coins!

What a terrifying sum!

The entire net worth of the Debs clan was only around a hundred million gold coins, and that was including all of their illiquid assets. For them to be able to pay such a huge fine would certainly require them to sell off many of their illiquid assets. Such a large-scale auction, in term, would definitely result in a great deal of lowballing and haggling from the buyers.

Although their illiquid assets were worth eighty million gold coins, the chances of them actually receiving eighty million gold coins was really too low.

“Linley, what do you think?” Clayde looked at Linley.

Linley laughed and nodded. “Admirably done, admirably done.”

The fine which Clayde had levied against the Debs clan was carefully calibrated, precisely because the valuation of the Debs clan’s illiquid assets worth around eighty million or so. If Clayde really were to sentence the Debs clan to extermination, then without a doubt, he wouldn’t have been able to get his hands on a single coin of their liquid assets.

But if the penalty fine was too high, perhaps the Debs clan would even risk extinction rather than pay the fine.

The fine of eighty million gold coins was neither too high nor too little. It was just right.

“Father.” Kalan and the others instantly went to help Bernard to his feet.

But Bernard only stared at his third brother, Kanter. A gloomy, calm look was on Kanter’s face. He only nodded towards Bernard. After he had been exposed in leading the smuggling operation, Kanter knew that he would die, without a question. But now that he was dying on behalf of the clan, the clan would most likely treat his son and his wife well.

Bernard nodded towards Kanter as well.

Two brothers. From a single exchange of glances, they knew what the other was thinking.

“Let us...go back.” Bernard said with a sigh.

After experiencing this tribulation, the Debs clan had suffered a major blow to its vitality. At absolute best, they would have a tenth of the economic power they previously had. From this day forward...the Debs clan had toppled from its

previous position of power at the highest levels in the Kingdom of Fenlai. They could only be considered a fairly wealthy clan, now."

.....

Within Linley's manor, in the Hot Springs Garden.

Linley was seated on a chair, quietly staring blankly.

"Linley, what are you pondering?" Doehring Cowart came out of the Coiling Dragon ring.

Linley glanced at Doehring Cowart. Sighing, he said, "Today, when I saw the Debs clan be sentenced, I suddenly thought of my own clan. My clan was once a clan which dominated the entire Yulan continent, but now, after all these generations, who is left? My father died, and my mother's whereabouts are unknown. Little Wharton is now in the O'Brien Empire. In the entire Holy Union, I am alone with no kin."

Linley was gripped by a powerful, lonely melancholy.

His parents were gone, and he was engaged in a mission of revenge that couldn't be revealed!

On this road to revenge, Linley's heart was tightly spun up, and he didn't dare to slacken off in the slightest.

Looking at Linley, Doehring Cowart felt surge of pity. Although superficially Linley seemed very mature, and didn't have any problems at all dealing with those important nobles...Linley was still only seventeen years old this year. He had just graduated from the magus academy not too long ago.

"Linley, relax. Don't give yourself too much pressure. You have plenty of time." Doehring Cowart encouraged him.

Linley looked at Doehring Cowart. On this lonely road he had been travelling, it was good that he had Grandpa Doehring with him, along with that mischievous rascal, Bebe.

"Thank you, Grandpa Doehring." Linley said gratefully.

Doehring Cowart began to chuckle.

"I really want to know what happened to my mother as soon as possible. I want to kill Clayde as soon as possible." Even if they ignored the fact that Clayde had

abducted his mother, the fact that he had caused his mother to be separated from their family for over ten years, resulting in the death of Linley's father, meant that without a doubt, Clayde had to die.

"Who knows when that 'King of Killers', Cesar, will bring that poison recipe." Linley was beginning to grow impatient.

.....

Each day, Linley had been urgently awaiting the return of Cesar, the 'King of Killers'. But each day passed with no news of Cesar. Time passed, and in the blink of an eye, it was now October. During this past month, the Kingdom of Fenlai had been fairly tranquil. The only major affair was the large-scale auction carried out by the Debs clan.

Many clans seized the opportunity to try to haggle with or lowball the Debs clan. However, the value of the Debs clan's illiquid assets really were very high, so there were quite a few bidders from other clans as well. Thus, the price at auction wasn't too low, in the end. The assets, previously valued at around eighty million gold coins, ended up selling for around seventy million gold in total.

After paying the fine of eighty million gold coins, the Debs clan could finally be considered as having escaped from danger.

But after this affair, the net worth of the Debs clan had essentially shrunk by 90%.

.....

October 10th was the day before Kanter's execution. This day, Linley remained in the Hot Springs Garden, training as he always did.

"Lord Linley, Lord Cesar has come!" A female attendant called out in a high-pitched voice from outside!

Linley had instructed that he must be immediately alerted if Cesar came.

"Cesar came?" Linley quickly threw on some clothes and immediately rushed out of the Hot Springs Garden. Given Linley's current speed, in ten seconds, he arrived outside the main hall. Right now, Cesar, still dressed in those long, loose robes, was seated lazily with one leg crossed. He was drinking a cup of tea.

"Mr. Cesar." Linley called out from afar. Three steps later, Linley entered the main hall.

Seeing Linley, Cesar's eyes lit up, and he immediately rose to his feet. "Master Linley, my truest apologies for only coming today." As he spoke, Cesar withdrew an envelope from his clothes. "Linley, this is the recipe I mentioned. It's all yours."

Chapter 23

Linley looked at the two female attendants outside the main hall. He called out coldly, "Leave. Without my orders, no one is to be permitted inside."

"Yes, milord."

The hearts of those two female attendants shook, and they quickly left.

"Master Linley, you are quite cautious." Cesar laughed.

Linley felt helpless.

Cautious?

How could he not be cautious? He was going to use this recipe to kill Clayde.

"This Cesar probably knew all along that I am intending to kill Clayde." Linley understood this point. Previously, he had told Cesar that he wanted to kill one of the six rulers of the kingdoms of the Holy Union. And then, he said he wanted to kill a warrior of the ninth rank.

As long as Cesar wasn't a total idiot, he would easily be able to connect these two points to understand that Linley wanted to kill a king of the Holy Union who was also a warrior of the ninth rank. In the entire Holy Union, the only one who fit these criteria was Clayde.

"Cesar, this old freak, wouldn't go curry favor with Clayde by selling me out." Linley felt quite confident.

What sort of person was Cesar? Would he deal with someone like Linley using tricks like these?

"Linley, you do indeed have to be careful. That person you intend to deal with is highly valued by the Radiant Church." Cesar said in a low voice by Linley's side. "And he has many guards as well. If you are to try and poison him, it will be quite hard."

Linley glanced at Cesar. "Thank you for your advice, Mr. Cesar."

Poison Clayde?

If Linley was willing to risk his life, he definitely would be able to succeed. All he had to do was to invite Clayde to his manor, and then serve Clayde some wine. In his own manor, lacing the wine was an extremely easy task. But if he did this, he would be revealing himself as the perpetrator.

He had to find an opportunity to kill Clayde without anyone knowing about it.

Such an opportunity was quite rare.

"I can't always rely on being lucky, like that time with Patterson insisting on meeting with me in secret." Linley said to himself. That private, secret meeting with Patterson really was an unexpected, wonderful surprise for Linley, but such surprises could only be wished for, not relied upon.

As he was considering this, Linley opened the envelope.

There was a piece of paper within the envelope, filled with countless words.

"Drug name: Bloodrupture Poison

Ingredients: Astralagus fruit, white ginseng, turmeric, fog grass, cloud fungus, bitterskin, cardamon kernels, Blueheart Grass.

Effect: Bloodrupture poison, when dissolved into wine or water, has no odor and no taste. To this date, no way of detecting it has been discovered. Once it is ingested, it will seep into the blood and then into the dantian, preventing battle-qi from being generated, causing a warrior to have less than 10% of his strength left. Anyone below the Saint-rank is vulnerable to this poison, and there is no cure. Only by using battle-qi over a long period of time to cleanse the poison from the bloodstream can one cure one's self.

Instructions: In order to produce one gram of Bloodrupture poison, one needs to have thirty grams of Astralagus fruit, twelve grams of white ginseng, ten grams of turmeric, fifteen grams of fog grass, twelve grams of cloud fungus, one gram of bitterskin, twelve grams of cardamon kernels, and one gram of Blueheart Grass. First use the twelve grams of ginseng, the fifteen grams of fog grass, and the gram of bitterskin. Place them into the alchemist's pot and boil them until the fog grass begins to emit white mist, then stop. Filter out the concentrated juice, then place it into the mixing pot and add in the Blueheart Grass, the turmeric, and the cardamon kernels....

Storage method:

This paper very clearly detailed every aspect of the manufacture and usage of the Bloodrupture poison. Just from examining the concocting procedures, Linley quickly understood how difficult it would be to produce this poison. If a single mistake was made in any of the procedures, the entire potion would be worthless.

The way to store it and preserve it was also very complicated.

The cost of a unit of Bloodrupture poison was more than a million times that of an equivalent weight of gold.

"Of the eight ingredients required to concoct this Bloodrupture poison, five of them aren't that rare. Astralagus fruit, white ginseng, turmeric, bitterskin, and cardamon kernels. The prices of these five shouldn't be considered too high for you. But the other three are very rare. That fog grass generally only grows in the far eastern plains, east of the Four Great Empires. It is extremely rare, and is rarely found in the marketplace. As for the other two ingredients, their rarity is even greater than that of fog grass!" Cesar explained carefully.

"Both Blueheart Grass and cloud fungus are virtually un-purchasable and cannot be found in the market, even if you have money. Supposedly, a while ago, someone tried to offer a hundred thousand gold coins to buy Blueheart Grass, but still was not able to do so. Cloud fungus, as well, hasn't appeared in the market for a long time."

Cesar patted Linley on his shoulders comfortingly. "Linley, it will take you quite a bit of effort to gather these eight ingredients."

Linley still felt a degree of confidence.

Of these eight ingredients, five wouldn't pose any problem at all. As for fog grass, even though it was rare, it shouldn't be too hard to buy it. As for Blueheart Grass...he had it already. There was no need to buy it. Right now, the only problem was the cloud fungus!

"Once I acquire the cloud fungus, I'll be able to produce some Bloodrupture poison. And that day will be the day of Clayde's death." Linley said to himself.

Linley could no longer endure any longer. If in the future, he still couldn't find an appropriate opportunity, he would go all out and kill Clayde, even if it meant exposing himself as the killer. If worst came to worst, he would go ask Yale for help and have the Dawson Conglomerate aid him in fleeing from the Holy Union.

Based on the influence and power of the Dawson Conglomerate, it wouldn't be too hard for them to help Linley escape from the Holy Union.

"Right now, what's important is finding these eight ingredients." Linley was still very happy right now.

At least he now had a goal to work towards.

"Linley. Linley." Cesar called out to him. "Ahem, Master Linley!"

"Uh?" Only now did Linley end his pondering and turn to look at Cesar. "Mr. Cesar, is there something you need?"

Cesar chortled. "Linley, are you perhaps forgetting something?"

Linley immediately understood. Laughing, he said, "Haha, Mr. Cesar, you are referring to the sculpture, right? I finished the sculpture you asked for a full month ago. Come, please, this way." Linley immediately led Cesar towards a side room.

In the corner of this side room, there was a man-shaped sculpture which radiated a cold, killing aura. Those two eyes contained within them a disdain for all life and an arrogance that forced viewers to feel awe and terror.

As for the facial features, the facial details were carved even more accurately. The sculpture looked exactly like Cesar.

"Wonderful, wonderful!!!" Cesar was so excited, he said the word wonderful twice.

"Master Linley, you truly are a master sculptor. In such a short period of time, you were able to produce such a flawless sculpture. In my mind, this sculpture is ten thousand times better than even that 'Awakening From the Dream' of yours." Staring at his sculpture, Cesar was grinning so widely that his face threatened to split.

The more he looked at this sculpture, the happier Cesar felt.

"This King of Killers is perhaps a bit too narcissistic." Seeing the grin on Cesar's face, Linley couldn't help but think this to himself.

.....

"Lord Linley." A nearby housekeeper bowed politely.

Linley pulled out a piece of paper and handed it to the housekeeper. "Go purchase these twelve ingredients for me. The exact amount I need for each is written on the paper."

"Yes, Lord Linley." The housekeeper accepted the piece of paper.

Of the twelve ingredients on the list of paper, six of them were the ones which Linley needed, while the other six were just some normal, random ingredients Linley had scribbled on as well. Of the twelve ingredients, only fog grass was relatively expensive. As for the Blueheart Grass and cloud fungus which the Bloodrupture poison required, Linley didn't even bother writing them down on this piece of paper.

Linley wasn't actually worried about these ingredients being made public.

After all, the secret formula for Bloodrupture poison was one of the secret formulas of the Deathgod's Hands. Aside from the Saber organization, most likely no one else knew this formula. And there were many other formulas that also used those ingredients.

After all, Linley didn't write down the two most critical ingredients; Blueheart Grass and cloud fungus.

"Find and purchase these ingredients for me as soon as possible." Linley instructed.

After giving his orders to the housekeeper, Linley immediately sent someone to invite Yale, Reynolds, and George to come meet with him at his manor. Whenever they had a chance, the four bros would meet and have food together, thus this wasn't out of character for Linley.

The next morning.

This was the day of Kanter Debs' execution by hanging, but Linley couldn't be bothered to go watch. He was in his manor, drinking wine and chatting with his three bros. Only after they finished drinking did Linley bring up what he wished to discuss.

"Boss Yale, there's something I want to ask you to help me with." Linley said.

"Third Bro, just let me know what you need." Yale said boldly.

Linley withdrew a piece of paper. "Boss Yale, I need two types of ingredients. One is fog grass, the other is cloud fungus. These two herbs are extremely rare, and are virtually unavailable on the market. I was hoping you could help me, Yale." Yale was supported by the Dawson Conglomerate, after all.

As one of the three great trading unions of the Yulan continent, the Dawson Conglomerate was a massive organization with astonishing abilities.

It would be much simpler for them to look for cloud fungus and fog grass than for Linley to do so on his own.

“Two types of herbs? Don’t worry about it. I’ll handle it for you.” His tongue slurred from wine, Yale pounded his chest and promised. At the same time, he took the piece of paper with the two herbs written down on it from Linley.

“I’ve seen fog grass at home when I was young. It is a very fun type of grass. Under the hot morning sun, it will emit white mist.” Reynolds immediately said.

Linley’s eyes lit up. However, Reynolds’ clan was back in the O’Brien Empire. From his clan to the Kingdom of Fenlai would require at least a year of travelling time. Linley didn’t have that much time to wait. Only if he absolutely couldn’t find it would he be forced to wait patiently.

“How long would it take us, if we were to wait for you to get fog grass from your home, Fourth Bro?” Yale snickered. “Third Bro, I’ll go talk to my Second Uncle right away and have him help you find these two ingredients.”

Yale really did handle Linley’s matters with high importance. That very day, he went to find his Second Uncle.

That night, with a private deluxe room, the brown-haired Myron [Mai’lon] Dawson was casually draped in a bathrobe. Bare-chested, he was lying on a reclining chair, while two beautiful young ladies were by his side, attending to him.

“Second Uncle, Second Uncle!” Yale’s voice sounded out from the other side of the door.

Myron curled his lips helplessly. Stroking the fragrant hair of the two beauties, he chuckled. “My dears, the two of you can go outside and wait a while.” Those two beautiful women left the deluxe room very obediently, and then Yale rushed in.

“Yale, you are already a grown up now. How can you act like this?” Myron Dawson said with a frown.

Yale chortled. “Second Uncle, don’t be angry. I’ve come today to ask for your help with something. This is something on behalf of my Third Bro, Linley.”

“Your Third Bro? That Linley fellow?” Myron immediately sat up straight. “Go ahead, what is it?”

Yale withdrew that piece of paper from his clothes. "Second Uncle, my Third Bro is in urgent need of these two types of herbs, which is why I'd like to ask you, Second Uncle, to help out and see if we can find them." As he spoke, he delivered the paper to Myron.

"Fog grass, cloud fungus?" Upon seeing the words on the paper, Myron Dawson nodded. "I'll send some people to investigate and see if there's any to be bought nearby."

"Haha, thanks, Second Uncle!" Yale was excited. "Then I won't disturb you, Second Uncle, from your festivities. I'll leave now."

"You little punk." Myron Dawson chuckled, then looked back at the piece of paper. "Fog grass and cloud fungus? What does this Linley need these two ingredients for?"

.....

Linley had to admit, the Dawson Conglomerate was an astonishingly efficient machine.

"Third Bro, within the various branches in the Holy Union of our Dawson Conglomerate, we only have a small amount of fog grass. As for cloud fungus, we had some a while ago, but it's already been shipped towards our headquarters. The headquarters of the Dawson Conglomerate is the place where we have the most herbs and ingredients. Here, let me give this fog grass to you first." Yale directly handed Linley a pouch.

Within the recipe, the amount of fog grass needed was measured in grams, but the pouch which Yale handed to Linley contained nine full clumps of fog grass. This amount was more than enough.

"So there's no cloud fungus available?" Linley accepted the pouch.

Yale nodded. "Third Bro, if you are in a hurry, I can have my Second Uncle send experts to ride flying magical beasts to head to our headquarters as soon as possible. Riding flying beasts is quite fast. From here to our headquarters, three months is more than enough."

Chapter 24

Linley was silent for a moment, then smiled and nodded apologetically at Yale. "Boss Yale, sorry for the hassle."

"It's no hassle." Yale chortled. "It's just sending someone to make a delivery is all. No big deal. Our Dawson Conglomerate often sends people to deliver letters to the headquarters. We'll get several things done."

Linley nodded.

"Third Bro." Yale's voice became solemn as he looked at Linley. "Tell me the truth. Why are you in such a rush to get these herbs?"

If it were someone else asking him, Linley totally could've lied and claimed that he was using it to make a medical lotion which would help him increase the speed at which his body gained strength. After all, it wasn't unheard of to bath in medicinal waters as part of training. But facing one of his bros, Linley didn't wish to lie.

"Boss Yale, right now, I can't tell you yet. When the time is right, I will tell you." Linley patted Yale on the shoulders as he spoke.

The bros of dorm 1987 had been together since they were young. They ate together, lived together, played together. They were as close as real brothers.

"Understood, Third Bro. But if you need anything at all, make sure you let me know." Yale didn't ask anything else.

The next day, Linley's housekeeper brought over the herbs which Linley had asked for, except he hadn't been able to find any fog grass. Based on what the housekeeper said, there was no fog grass available on the market at all. If they wanted to buy some, they would have to send someone to buy it from the Four Great Empires.

After all, fog grass was cultivated from the great plains to the far east. Some of the market centers of the Four Great Empires fairly close to the great plains did have a small amount of fog grass for sale.

"Right now, of the eight ingredients I need to produce Bloodrupture poison, seven are ready. All I'm missing is cloud fungus." Within his secret study, Linley had put all of the various herbs in front of him on a table, pondering what to do. Of the eight ingredients, there were three that were rare. Fog grass had been procured by the Dawson Conglomerate, while he already had enough Blueheart Grass.

"If I wait three months, then at that time, the people from the Dawson Conglomerate will come and deliver the cloud fungus." Linley felt very confident.

At most, three months. At that time, he would have all the ingredients that he needed, and would thus be able to prepare a few mixtures of Bloodrupture poison.

But Linley wasn't the sort of person to sit around waiting.

"Help me spread the word. Let it be known that I am preparing to begin a period of training with the usage of herbal baths, and need cloud fungus as one of my components. I'm willing to pay up to a million gold coins for it." Linley instructed his housekeeper.

Although Linley wouldn't lie to his bros, he had to give a good excuse to the rest of the world.

Cloud fungus, in and of itself, was not a poisonous plant. It actually was greatly beneficial to the body. But all herbs possessed their own wondrous properties. When these eight herbs were all refined and processed together, they would be able to produce a poisonous powder like the Bloodrupture poison.

"Yes, Lord Linley." Upon hearing the words, 'a million gold coins', the housekeeper's heart trembled.

To Linley, a million gold coins really wasn't much. When he had auctioned off his sculpture, 'Awakening From the Dream', the price was twelve million gold coins. Afterwards, when Patterson had secretly met with him, he had gifted Linley another ten million gold coins. After Linley's rise to prominence and appointment to the rank of Prime Court Magus, the Radiant Church, King Clayde, and many other nobles had all given Linley many valuable gifts.

And just a short while ago, the Debs clan had gifted Linley with a magicrystal card that had one million gold coins on it.

Linley's current net worth was well over twenty million gold coins.

And this wasn't even counting the Saint-level magicite core that Linley had acquired from the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear. That core, which Linley was keeping hidden, was a priceless treasure which probably was worth more than even a hundred million gold coins.

The news that Linley was seeking to buy cloud fungus for a million gold coins originally only spread amongst herbal merchants, but shortly afterwards, all the various nobles of the Kingdom of Fenlai learned of it as well. All of those nobles now knew that Master Linley needed cloud fungus.

If they could provide Linley with the cloud fungus, not only would they receive a million gold coins, they would also have a chance to build up a relationship with Linley.

Many nobles began to wrack their brains for methods by which they could locate cloud fungus.

But alas, cloud fungus was far too rare, and far too expensive.

After ordering this news to be spread out, Linley continued his life of solitary, pitiless training within his manor. In the blink of an eye, November arrived, and with it the temperature began to drop as well. The leaves of the trees within the Hot Springs Garden began to turn yellow and fall, filling the grass with fallow leaves.

“Haaaaa!”

Linley, who had been engaging in one-finger vertical push-ups suddenly exerted strength through his fingers, flipping himself into the air. Somersaulting easily through the air, Linley landed on the ground, his bare upper chest covered in sweat.

Aided by the Supergravity Field, after having trained for so long, even Linley’s powerful body was beginning to feel tired.

“Whew.”

Standing normally again, Linley felt the muscles in and near his fingers, arms, and shoulders all feel numb and sore. He found this feeling to be very comfortable, as he knew that in this situation, his muscles and bones were slowly strengthening.

The way to train one’s body was to exceed one’s limits time and time again, so long as one didn’t exceed the limits by too much each time.

Seating himself cross-legged, Linley immediately began to train in accordance with the ‘Secret Dragonblood Manual’, allowing the liquefied Dragonblood battle-qi in his dantian to begin to rush out. In a short while, the mighty Dragonblood battle-qi had filled Linley’s entire body.

Training, time and time again. Each time, the Dragonblood battle-qi would become a bit more pure, and Linley’s bones and flesh would become a bit stronger.

The azurish-black Dragonblood battle-qi entered his dantian again, then spread out again. The dantian was the nucleus for a Dragonblood Warrior. Linley had reached the late-stage of the sixth rank long ago, and in September and October, he had reached the peak of the sixth rank.

Right now, Linley had reached a plateau. He could break through any day now.

“Crack. Crack.” All sorts of strange sounds began to emit from Linley’s body. Linley’s muscles seemed to have a mouse buried beneath them, as they began to ripple up and down nonstop. Even his veins were popping out, and throughout Linley’s body, beads of sweat and beads of blood were beginning to come out!

“I’m finally about to break through.” Linley was shocked and pleased.

He had waited far too long for this day.

“Bubble, bubble.”

That azurish-black Dragonblood battle-qi began to roil about strangely, filling Linley’s entire body with pain. But within his dantian, that liquefied Dragonblood battle-qi began to condense itself yet again, increasing in density by several factors. The Dragonblood battle-qi was being drawn back into the dantian nonstop. And then, it would once again be emitted from the dantian yet again, forming a circle.

Whenever the Dragonblood battle-qi entered the dantian, it would transform.

After roughly an hour’s time had passed, all of the Dragonblood battle-qi in Linley’s body had undergone this transformation. Although there was theoretically only a thin barrier between the peak of the sixth rank and the early seventh rank, Linley’s strength was now several times greater than it had been in the past.

Linley opened his eyes, a look of uncontrollable excitement within them.

“Haha, I’ve finally entered the realm of a warrior of the seventh rank.” Linley was extremely excited.

As long as he were to agitate the Dragonblood battle-qi in his body, he would be able to assume the Dragonform. The training speed of the Dragonblood Warriors was extremely high, especially in the earlier stages. Linley had spent just about half a year before advancing from the sixth rank to the seventh rank. This sort of advancement was extremely astounding.

But Linley estimated that to progress from the seventh rank to the eighth rank, he would need several years, most likely.

The farther along one was, the harder the road would become. But nonetheless, most Dragonblood Warriors only needed a few decades to reach the Saint-level in power.

Bebe, who had been sleeping nearby this entire time, opened his sleepy eyes, which suddenly brightened. Excitedly, he spiritually said to Linley, “Boss, you reached the seventh rank?”

"Yeah." Linley nodded happily.

"Then doesn't that mean, once you Dragonform, you have the power of an early-stage ninth rank?" Bebe was excited. "Looks like your power is gonna be more than mine now, Boss!"

Linley began to laugh as well.

In the early stages, the boost to power provided by the Dragonform was quite dramatic. For example, as a warrior of the seventh rank, in the Yulan continent, he could only be considered an unremarkable fellow. But upon using the Dragonform, he would be an early-stage ninth rank warrior, who was qualified to be considered a notable figure in the world.

However, the more powerful one grew, the weaker the boost provided by the Dragonform would be.

Dragonform, after all, was nothing more than forcibly drawing out the Dragonblood which a weak Dragonblood Warrior hadn't been able to fully absorb.

"Early-stage ninth rank, and your Dragonform was influenced by the Armored Razorback Wurm. The Armored Razorback Wurm specializes in speed and defense, while you also possess strong defense and unquestionably high speed." Doehring Cowart appeared from the ring at this time.

Linley was very confident in his own speed.

Because after taking on the Dragonform, not only did he have the natural high speed of a Dragonblood Warrior, he could also utilize wind-style magic and boost himself with a Supersonic spell of the seventh rank, which would increase his speed by a good amount.

Linley was so pleased that he just stood there, grinning stupidly.

"Boss, stop laughing like an idiot. Look at yourself, you're filthy. Take a bath, jeeze." Bebe intentionally put a disgusted look on his face while covering his nose and jumping up and down as he bared his fangs at Linley.

Linley looked at himself.

At this moment, his body was covered in both sweat and blood. He really did look dirty.

"Splash!"

Linley jumped directly into the hot springs pool. The water in the hot springs was constantly flowing, so Linley didn't worry about getting it dirty. After having experienced the sensation of his entire body transforming, then having the hot springs water rush against it, Linley felt so comfortable that he lay within the hot springs pool, eyes closed.

He fell asleep.

He felt so comfortable that he actually fell asleep.

Just as Linley was enjoying a beautiful dream, a voice rang out from outside. "Lord Linley. Lord Linley." The female attendant's voice clearly sounded rather anxious.

Linley's eyes suddenly opened. Hearing the voice, he couldn't help but frown. "Come in."

Only then did that female attendant dare to enter the gardens. Standing at the side of the hot springs pool, she snuck a few looks at Linley's naked body, then respectfully said, "Lord Linley, a herald from the palace is waiting outside. He says that he has come at the command of his Majesty, who is inviting you, Lord Linley, to make a trip to the palace."

"By command of his Majesty?" Linley hesitated slightly, then directly clambered out of the pool.

"You can leave now." Linley always dressed himself, as he didn't like the female attendants helping him dress.

"Yes." Her cheeks scarlet red, the female attendant quickly lowered her head and fled the Hot Springs Garden.

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Seated in a carriage, headed for the palace. Outside the carriage, aside from sixteen palace soldiers, there were sixteen knights from the Radiant Church. Linley's entourage was larger than that of even the Left Premier or the Right Premier.

"Lord Linley, his Majesty is currently within the East Flower Garden." The shrill voice of the palace attendant rang out.

"Lead the way." Linley said abruptly.

The palace attendant was very deferential towards Linley, smiling at him the entire way.

"Who else has his Majesty invited this time?" Linley asked.

"Just you, Lord Linley." The palace attendant replied.

"Just me?" Linley began to feel suspicious, but he didn't ask anything further. Under the guidance of the palace attendant, Linley finally arrived at the palace's East Flower Garden. As it was now already November, there were very few flowers which were still in bloom. But the countless flowers in the East Flower Garden of the palace were still vibrant and beautiful.

And that 'Golden Lion', King Clayde, was currently chatting with his Queen in the garden.

"Haha, Linley, you came." Clayde greeted Linley in a very friendly manner. "Come, sit." "Your Majesty. Queen." Linley paid his respects, then sat down.

Clayde and the Queen exchanged glances, and then he grinned at Linley. "Linley, I heard that you have been looking for cloud fungus in order to create a medicinal bath for yourself?"

"Yes." Linley nodded.

Suddenly, Linley had an idea as to why Clayde had specially requested his presence at the palace. But Linley didn't quite dare to believe it. He was searching for this cloud fungus for the sake of dealing with Clayde. Could it be that Clayde was going to...

"Haha, I knew you were searching for this cloud fungus, so I sent my men out to do a search. By a stroke of good fortune, my palace storehouse just so happened to have a single clump of cloud fungus." Clayde glanced at a nearby female attendant, who immediately presented a golden brocade box she was holding to Linley.

Linley was really, truly stunned.

The cloud fungus that he had been so desperately seeking, had been provided to him by King Clayde!

Chapter 25

Cloud fungus. The true reason why Linley was seeking cloud fungus was to use it to produce Bloodrupture poison powder. And the reason why he wanted to produce Bloodrupture poison was because he was going to use it on Clayde.

But in the end, it was Clayde who provided the cloud fungus to him.

“Can it be that hidden deep within the world, there really is such a thing as the cycle of karma?” Linley suddenly thought of the teachings of the Radiant Church, one part of which discussed fate. In the past, Linley had never believed in any religion, but this affair really had developed in a very bizarre way.

Given that the cloud fungus had just been delivered into his hands, how could he not take it?

“Thank you, your Majesty.” Linley smiled, bowing in thanks while accepting the cloud fungus.

But in his heart, Linley was laughing coldly. “Since you’ve given it to me, this means that the heavens themselves desire your death. You can’t blame me.”

Linley had virtually no memories of his mother, but that didn’t stop Linley from deeply desiring to have had a mother’s love. Due to never having known his mother, Linley had always been a bit lonely. Whenever he saw someone else’s mother and felt a bit unhappy, he would think silent, lonely thoughts of his mother.

Upon capturing Clayde, he definitely would be able to discover his mother’s whereabouts!

“Linley, I’ve invited the Right Premier for lunch today. Stay here and have lunch with us, why won’t you.” Clayde beamed at Linley.

“Yes, your Majesty.” Linley’s attitude was very humble.

The Queen nodded gracefully to Linley, then said to Clayde in a gentle voice, “Your Majesty, you and Master Linley can remain here. I’ll go back now.” Clayde nodded calmly as well. In the Kingdom of Fenlai, the King’s authority vastly outstripped that of the Queen’s.

November. The temperature was getting cold.

But Linley and Clayde were both dressed lightly, not afraid of the cold in the slightest. Linley was now a warrior of the seventh rank, while Clayde was an even mightier warrior of the ninth rank.

“Your Majesty, why did you invite Merritt to dine with you?” Linley was chatting naturally and casually with Clayde.

Hearing Linley's words, a very satisfied smile appeared on Clayde's face. He glanced at the nearby palace maids, who very obediently left. Only then did Clayde say in a low voice, "Linley, are you aware that Merritt has recently married his thirteenth wife?"

"Thirteenth?" Linley was stunned.

He didn't know that this apparently serious, solemn judge, the Lord Right Minister, was so fickle in love.

"His new wife is an extremely flavorful woman." Clayde revealed a smile towards Linley, a type of smile all men understood.

Seeing that expression on Clayde's face, Linley couldn't help but be startled.

"Haha..." Clayde patted Linley on the shoulders. "Linley. Next year, you will be eighteen. Don't tell me you've never tasted a woman before."

Linley couldn't help but feel awkward.

Clayde sighed, "Merritt, that kid, was actually able to acquire such an intoxicating little vixen. It really does make one jealous. But since I've taken a fancy to her, that intoxicating little vixen is mine. Merritt won't even dare to touch her from now on."

Clayde openly spoke of such affairs to Linley.

"Your Majesty? Is that...is that appropriate?" Linley was a bit surprised.

She was, after all, the wife of the Right Minister. But from the sound of it, Clayde was going to directly seize her for himself.

"What's inappropriate about it? Merritt only climbed to his current position through women to begin with. He should know very well what his place is. But Linley, that day when Merritt got married and had his banquet, I think you didn't attend." Clayde said questioningly.

During this period of time, Linley had been pondering the question of alchemy and herbal ingredients. He had no inclination to go to a wedding at all. Generally speaking, Linley declined all banquet invitations from nobles.

The wedding banquet of the Right Premier?

Declined all the same!

“Linley, how about today, during lunch, you take a look at Merritt’s new wife, Windsor [Wen’sa]. If you like her, I don’t mind giving her to you. I can guarantee that no matter how daring and audacious Merritt might be, he won’t dare to touch Windsor a single time.” Clayde said confidently.

Clayde possessed absolute authority within the Kingdom of Fenlai.

The day of Merritt’s wedding, Clayde had taken a fancy towards Windsor. That very night, Clayde had sent someone to bring Windsor to a manor outside, and he, Clayde, had thoroughly enjoyed himself.

As for Merritt, he didn’t dare to show any hint of temper.

What’s more, ever since that night, Merritt no longer dared to touch Windsor.

Some of the major ministers in the Kingdom of Fenlai had risen to their ranks through their abilities. Those were truly capable ministers indeed. But some ministers had clawed their way to their current ranks through some unsightly deeds.

Linley was secretly surprised at Clayde’s forcefulness.

But then again, Clayde, the one whom men named the ‘Golden Lion’, had always been as forceful as a lion. One could imagine how despotically he could act if he so chose.

“Your Majesty, Duke Merritt and the Duchess have arrived.” A palace attendant ran over and said respectfully.

“Haha, come, Linley.” Clayde immediately stood up.

Holding the packaged cloud fungus, Linley could only follow Clayde out. But shortly afterwards, they arrived at a very graceful, light red courtyard within the palace.

Merritt and that Madame Windsor were there, waiting at the gate to the courtyard.

Linley couldn’t help but glance at the Madame Windsor who had drawn Clayde’s interest.

Madame Windsor’s body was extremely slender. Although she was dressed very conservatively, her tight clothes accentuated every curve and every line of her slender body. Her waist was so slender, and yet her bosom was so full.

Her dark red hair was so alluring.

In particular, this Madame Windsor's eyes were soul-beguiling. Anyone who saw her would unconsciously begin to think improper thoughts.

"Your Majesty. Lord Linley." Merritt said, and that Madame Windsor echoed him in her gentle voice.

"She really is quite an enchanting vixen." Linley said to himself.

Clayde cast a delighted glance at Linley. In a low voice, he said to Linley, "What do you think? Do you feel a bit a bit of an urge to...?"

"Your Majesty, let's go in and have lunch." Linley said in a low voice.

"Haha..." Clayde began to laugh loudly.

That Windsor couldn't help but turn to stare at Linley with her beguiling eyes, seemingly quite interested in Linley. If Merritt and Clayde hadn't been there, perhaps she might have gone directly up to Linley and struck up a conversation with him.

"Wow, what a beautiful lady." Bebe, on Linley's shoulders the entire time, said, his eyes growing round.

"Swish."

Bebe actually leapt off of Linley's shoulders, landing directly...on Windsor's bosom.

"It's so big..." Bebe's voice sounded out in Linley's mind.

Linley was flabbergasted.

"What an adorable mouse!" Windsor excitedly cuddled Bebe, who used his little head to rub himself against her ampleness, seeming to enjoy himself very much.

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"Whew."

Bebe in hand, Linley managed to finally leave the palace. This entire time in the palace, that Windsor kept on using her beguiling eyes to stare at him. Even Linley found it hard to endure.

They entered the carriage.

"Return." Linley snapped an order to his guards, and the carriage immediately began to move. "Hey, Boss, what's the rush? Right, didn't that Clayde say he was willing to give Windsor to you? You should accept." Bebe's beady little eyes stared at Linley.

Linley couldn't help but smack Bebe on his head. "You perverted little mouse."

"Hrmph, I'm about to be of age, y'know." Bebe said unhappily.

Linley didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

But thinking back to what he had gained from this trip to the palace, Linley couldn't help but let a hint of a smile appear on his face. He took out the case by his side.

Within this case was a clump of cloud fungus.

"Now that I have the cloud fungus in hand, all eight ingredients are ready. I have what I need to produce the Bloodrupture poison powder." Linley had already decided that he would immediately start to produce the powder when he got back home.

"Boss, I feel like that Clayde is rather brotherly, stand-up guy. Are you really going to kill him?" Bebe said in a low voice.

Frowning, Linley turned to look at Bebe.

"Bebe, Clayde is the ruler of a country. As long as he has any brains at all, he would naturally try to build a good relationship with me. He is friendly and does right by me, only because of my status and my potential. If I didn't have potential, then Clayde probably wouldn't even bother to notice me. Perhaps if I had a beautiful wife, he would directly take her for his own pleasure. Just like with that Merritt."

Linley understood Clayde quite well.

A person like Clayde was actually quite heartless. But he could still be considered a capable ruler. At least, he was able to distinguish between capable ministers and useless ones.

"In fact, I even am beginning to wonder if, in the past, Clayde saw that my mother was beautiful and therefore wanted her for himself." Upon seeing Windsor, Linley had thought of this possibility.

Based on Clayde's personality, this was not impossible.

“Bebe, tell me, how can I spare Clayde?” Linley looked at Bebe. Just thinking about that possibility filled Linley with a boundless desire to kill.

Perhaps because he could feel the killing desire Linley was feeling towards Clayde, Bebe instantly said, “Kill him, kill him. I, Bebe, will be the first to act against him.” Bebe rose to his feet, waving his two paws around while baring his fangs, demonstrating to Linley the deep hatred he, too, felt for Clayde.

“No need for you to act. After finding out about my mother’s whereabouts, I will be the first to act.” Linley said coldly.

Within the secret room in Linley’s manor, under the light of eighteen lanterns, the entire room was bright. Linley was carefully following the procedures for producing Bloodrupture poison powder.

The procedure for producing this powder was extremely complicated. Each step required caution, caution, caution.

If there was even the slightest error, then the ingredients would have been wasted.

Right now, on the table within the secret room, there were alchemist’s tools, and the eight ingredients, all chopped up into many small pieces.

“Gurgle, gurgle.”

Linley filtered the herbal juice out from the alchemist’s pot, then placed this juice into a new, clean pot and began to boil it. At the same time, Linley began to carefully add the three remaining ingredients to the mixture.

“Can’t get the order wrong. I should put in the Blueheart Grass, then the turmeric, then the cardamon kernels.”

Staring at the alchemy pot, Linley focused all of his concentration onto it, carefully watching it for any reactions. Each step had to be controlled with extreme precision.

An entire night passed.

“I’ve finally produced a single liquid dose.” Linley carefully strained the small amount of clear liquid out of the alchemist’s pot, pouring it into a white tray.

“This translucent liquid seems to be just like clear water. There’s no distinguishable difference at all.” Linley sighed emotionally.

Based on the instructions for producing Bloodrupture poison powder, this final liquid dose could already be considered a form of Bloodrupture poison. However, only allowing it to dry into powder form would it reach its highest level of potency.

By now, this liquid dose had already been boiled once, and not much water remained within it. Most likely, within ten days time, it would totally dry and transform into the Bloodrupture poison powder.

“The first dose was a success. Tomorrow, I’ll make a second dose.” Linley was very careful.

He didn’t dare to use all the materials on a single attempt. After all, if he were to fail, it would be disastrous. By dividing the materials into multiple attempts, at least a single failure wouldn’t be too disastrous.

A single dosage of poison powder should be enough. But, to be cautious, Linley had decided to prepare multiple doses.

Year 9999 of the Yulan calendar. The end of November.

The six doses of Bloodrupture poison which Linley had produced had completely dried into powder form. Just by looking at its translucent, crystalline form, it was hard to imagine something which could so dramatically cripple the power of a warrior of the ninth rank.

“Whew. Although I’ve used up all my ingredients, these six doses of poison powder should be enough.” Looking at the six packets of powder on his table, Linley let out a long breath.

For the sake of this Bloodrupture poison powder, Linley really had expended a great deal of time and effort. And now, he had succeeded.

“Now, the only thing that I am missing is an opportunity to make my move against Clayde.” Linley couldn’t help but begin to ponder a way to poison Clayde and capture him without anyone suspecting that it had been Linley who did it.

Chapter 26

This would be difficult!

If it was within the palace, Linley would have to first find an opportunity to use the poison, and then both question and kill Clayde within the confines of the palace.

“Even if I don’t worry about the issue of being discovered to be the murderer, upon killing Clayde, it will be very hard to escape the palace.” In Linley’s mind, one possibility after another appeared, then was discarded.

Linley finally reached a conclusion...

“To use poison within the palace and then escape afterwards is virtually impossible.” Linley discarded this possibility entirely. After all, there were simply too many experts in the palace. Only if he used the Dragonform would he be able to cut his way out.

But Linley was not willing to expose the secret that he could Dragonform.

“It has to be outside the palace.” Linley felt his head hurt.

A place outside the palace, where Clayde would be willing to be alone with him. And, the place had to be a standalone place. This was extremely difficult. Clayde was, after all, the king. If someone wanted to meet with him, they would go in person to the palace.

Linley couldn’t, after all, send someone to the palace and ask King Clayde to come meet him.

Linley had never heard of a situation where a subject would request a ruler to come see them. This clearly was unfeasible. Even if Clayde gave him face and agreed, Clayde would most likely be suspicious and on guard.

As soon as Clayde became on his guard, the chance of success would be lowered.

“I have to find an opportunity to be with him alone in a place outside the palace.” Despite having been in Fenlai City for so long, Linley had never been in a one-on-one situation with Clayde before.

Generally speaking, they would only meet at banquets.

But Linley couldn’t make his move at a banquet, in front of an audience of countless people, could he?

“What to do?”

Linley was beginning to feel vexed.

Early December. The temperature of Fenlai City suddenly dropped, and the first snow of this winter came as well. The entire Fenlai City was covered white, and the

cold bite of the air caused many nobles to hide inside their homes, unwilling to venture outside.

Still dressed in loose robes, Linley was strolling on the snow-covered streets, escorted by two guards.

“Crunch. Crunch.” The sound of footsteps on the snow.

The snow-covered Fenlai City was exceptionally alluring. On the gates of the noble manors on each side of the Greenleaf Road were countless icicles. The reflected rays of the sun glittered off of them, making them seem all the more beautiful to behold.

The towering, snow-covered pine trees in front of the manors seemed exceptionally beautiful as well.

The scene was a beautiful one.

But Linley’s mood was foul.

“That Clayde is already a warrior of the ninth rank. Although advancing from the ninth rank to the Saint-level is very hard, perhaps one day he will suddenly break through. By then, it will be even more hopeless.” Linley really didn’t want to wait any longer.

The earlier he made his move against Clayde, the greater his chance of success.

But he needed an opportunity.

“Boss, look. Many of the nearby manors have been renovated and redecorated.” Bebe’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind.

While walking on the road, Linley’s thoughts were elsewhere, so naturally he hadn’t noticed. But upon hearing Bebe’s words, Linley noticed that the manors alongside Greenleaf Road were now different from before.

“This is...” Linley said questioningly.

“Hang it up. Good. Now move it a bit to the left.” A servant of the nearest manor was busy hanging up various decorations under the instruction of a nearby man.

“Those are...Yulan flowers!” Linley noticed the decorations hanging next to the door and what patterns they had. The patterns looked like Yulan flowers.

Suddenly, Linley understood what was going on.

“Right! It’s already December. The Yulan Festival will be coming quite soon. And it will be the 10000th Yulan Festival!” Linley knew the importance of this particular Yulan Festival.

Year 10000 of the Yulan calendar, January 1st. That would perhaps be the most festive day in the history of the Yulan continent. No wonder every single noble clan was putting up so many decorations.

“Crunch!”

One of the steps on a ladder which the servant was standing on while hanging up decorations suddenly broke. The servant lost his footing, wobbled, and then fell down, first banging against the ladder, and then slamming into the stone ground head-first, his fresh blood staining the ground red.

The nearby servants all were frightened.

“Are you okay?” All of them ran forward to help the man up.

“A bit...a bit dizzy...” That wounded man said in a weak voice. Fortunately, the ladder wasn’t too high, and so the force with which he struck the ground wasn’t too great either. That was the only reason he had survived.

“Alright, that’s enough for you for today. Go home and rest. Kohl [Ke’er], go take care of him. Jeeze, you weren’t even that high up, but you managed to smash yourself this badly.” The manager shook his head helplessly.

The servant named Kohl immediately helped prop up the wounded servant and began to assist him back to his home.

Seeing this, Linley was stunned.

“Lord...Lord Linley?” Only now did that manager notice Linley, and he quickly went forward to pay his respects to Linley. This manor was the manor of Duke Bonalt, and Linley had come here before. Naturally, this manager recognized Linley.

“Good morning, Lord Linley,” the manager said with a bow.

Only now did Linley recover from his stupor. An excited smile appearing on his face, he looked at the man and chuckled. “Haha, good morning to you as well. Haha, alright, time to go home.”

Excited, Linley immediately turned around, leading his guards back.

"Hey, why is our lord so happy?" Those two warriors began to chat with each other in low voices.

They had seen what a foul mood Linley had been in this morning, so what had suddenly caused him to be so excited?

"This method is so simple. Why didn't I think of it? Haha!" Linley couldn't help but slap himself on the head. He really had obsessed so much that his brain had gone bad.

Linley had already come up with a surefire method to bring Clayde to visit him. This method was...receive an injury!

"I'll pretend that when I was training battle-qi, I suffered some internal injuries by accident. If I'm wounded, from what I've seen thus far, Clayde will most likely come to visit me."

Linley was feeling unbelievably happy. As long as he made his move within his own manor, it would be very easy for him to plot against Clayde.

"As for the status and wealth granted by the Holy Union, I've never cared too much. After I find out what happened to my mother and kill Clayde, I will use the backchannels of the Dawson Conglomerate to flee from the Holy Union's domain." Linley had already come to a firm decision.

The Holy Union held no attractions for Linley.

Right now, his one and only family member, little Wharton, was staying in the O'Brien Empire. There was nothing in the Holy Union preventing Linley from leaving.

To kill Clayde in a way which wouldn't raise any suspicions was virtually impossible. Since this was impossible, the only choice Linley had was to accept that he would have to make a small sacrifice. To Linley, the Holy Union held no further attractions, after all.

Linley's manor. The Hot Springs Garden.

Linley was seated cross-legged within the grassy area, cultivating Dragonblood battle-qi. Like the ferocious waves of the ocean, the Dragonblood battle-qi burst forth, clashing against every blood vessel in his body.

In truth, the average warrior of the seventh rank wouldn't be able to withstand such training. But Linley was different. He had drank blood from a living dragon.

Generally speaking, when dragon's blood was applied to the outside of one's body, it would acquire an astonishing durability. But Linley had actually drank it into his stomach, which caused all of his blood vessels to also gain an incredible degree of resiliency.

"Paagh!"

Linley suddenly vomited out a mouthful of fresh blood, and his face turned white.

"Aaaaargh!" A painful, guttural roar ripped out from Linley's mouth.

Right now, all of the female attendants outside the Hot Springs Garden could faintly hear that low roar of Linley's, and they all rushed against the door, pressing their ears against it to listen carefully.

"Lord Linley...seems to be in a lot of pain?" One of the skinnier attendants said questioningly.

"Seems like it." Another, chubbier attendant nodded.

But none of them dared to go inside.

"Lord Linley?" That skinnier attendant called out.

"Come...come in..." Linley's voice rang out.

Those two attendants exchanged glances, then immediately pushed the door open and ran inside. But upon arriving at the grassy area, they were both frightened. There was a large pool of blood on the ground, and Linley was collapsed on the ground, his face pale.

"Assist me to my room." Linley said in a low voice.

"Yes. Yes."

The two female attendants were a bit frantic. Each of them helping hold Linley by an arm, they immediately assisted Linley all the way to his private bedroom.

"Milord, should we ask for the light-style magi to come?" The skinnier female attendant asked.

"No need. My injuries are internal. Magic won't be able to help. I have to quietly recover." Linley took a deep breath, then assumed the meditation position on the bed, his eyes closing. "The two of you can leave now."

"Yes, milord." The two female attendants bowed respectfully and left.

Both the light-style and the water-style recovery spells were spells of a reparative nature, allowing physical wounds to heal. But to damage done to internal organs, they wouldn't be of much assistance.

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Within Linley's room. Only him and Yale were present.

"Third Bro, you aren't injured?" Yale was confused. "If you aren't injured, why are you pretending to be injured? And asked to meet with me so urgently." Even before he feigned injury, Linley had sent someone to ask for Yale.

Linley said in a low voice, "Boss Yale, this affair has to do with my revenge. Boss Yale. I can tell you now. That Clayde is most likely the person who killed my mother."

"The person who killed your mother?" Yale stared. "Third Bro, you are planning to...?"

"Right. Get revenge." Linley didn't hide anything from his bro.

"That Clayde is a warrior of the ninth rank. How are you going to get revenge on him? And he's the king of the Kingdom of Fenlai as well." Yale was growing frantic with concern for Linley.

Linley said solemnly, "Don't worry. I already have total confidence in my ability to deal with him. However, after I kill Clayde, then even if the Radiant Church spares me and doesn't kill me, my life will most likely be made miserable. Thus I have decided that after I kill Clayde, I will immediately leave the Holy Union."

"Leave the Holy Union?" Yale was startled, but then he quickly understood. "Right. You do need to leave. Leave this to me. The mercantile power of our Dawson Conglomerate is spread over every major city in the Holy Union. It will be very easy for us to smuggle a person out of the Holy Union with no one the wiser."

"What's more, our Dawson Conglomerate has master disguisers as well." Yale was totally confident.

Linley knew full well how powerful the Dawson Conglomerate was. How could one of the three major trading unions of the Yulan continent be trifled with?

"I know. That's why, Boss Yale, I want for you to arrange for someone to wait for me at that hotel at the end of the Greenleaf Road. When I arrive there later, you can help arrange for me to be smuggled outside the Holy Union."

Linley was very confident that after killing Clayde, he would be able to easily make his way to this hotel.

"No worries." Yale nodded.

"Third Bro." Yale frowned, looking at Linley. "You have to be careful."

Linley smiled at Yale. "Boss Yale, you must have faith in me."

The news that Linley had been injured quickly spread out. The first to receive this news was not the ruler of the Kingdom of Fenlai; it was the Cardinal of the Radiant Church, Guillermo.

But very quickly, King Clayde and the various nobles of Fenlai received the news that Linley had suffered an injury when training. Although injuries caused by training were rather rare, they weren't unheard of. Generally speaking, only someone who trained too hard and exceeded his body's maximum limits would suffer such an injury, and sometimes even harm the organs. "The only thing to do now is to wait for King Clayde." Wearing a loose robe, Linley sat on a chair in his bedroom, his face ashen.

Bebe was standing on a nearby chair as well.

"Lord Linley." The female attendant from outside ran in.

Linley's eyes couldn't help but light up. But then, Linley immediately returned to presenting himself as 'weak'. Looking at the attendant, he said calmly, "What is it."

"Lord Cardinal Guillermo has arrived." The female attendant hurriedly said.

"Oh?" Linley's heart was suddenly gripped with worry.

Although Guillermo's visit had been expected, Linley suddenly thought of something...what if Guillermo was present when King Clayde arrived as well? Then it would be very difficult for him to act against Clayde.

After all, Guillermo was a magus of the ninth rank. That Bloodrupture poison was used primarily against warriors to weaken their power, and didn't have much of an impact on magi.

"Linley!" Just at this moment, Guillermo's voice sounded out from outside the room.

Chapter 27

Linley couldn't help but turn his head to the door.

Guillermo was there, dressed in a long, red robe, a smile on his face, his waist straight. His eyes, however, were very fierce and resolved. Under the escort of the two Vicars, Guillermo strode into the room.

"So Guillermo has already arrived. I hope Clayde will be a bit slower." Linley was filled with anticipation.

The only weakness in this plan of his was the possibility that Clayde and this magus of the ninth rank would come at the same time. After all, the Bloodrupture poison was of no use against a magus.

Linley immediately began to stand up. "Lord Guillermo."

"Linley, look at yourself. Your face is so pale. Sit, sit." Guillermo immediately took two quick steps forward to stop Linley from rising.

"Lord Guillermo, I'm fine. Although I suffered some internal injuries while training battle-qi, I can still walk and act normally. Only, it's a pity that for a period of time, I won't be able to train battle-qi any more." Linley said with a long sigh.

"At a time like this, you are still thinking of training battle-qi?" Guillermo said angrily. "External injuries are easy to heal, but internal ones are much more dangerous. If you don't heal them properly, it's possible that they'll cause harm to you for your entire life."

"Thank you, Lord Guillermo, for your concern."

In truth, Linley had a very good impression of Guillermo. He couldn't help but cast a glance to the entranceway. "I hope this Clayde will arrive a bit later."

Yesterday's blizzard had caused Fenlai City to become very cold, and there were very few people on the road from the palace. But right now, a hundred-man strong contingent of guards were currently protecting and escorting a lavish golden carriage out of the palace.

"Crunch. Crunch."

The wheels of the carriage crushed through the snow.

"Ransome [Lan'sai'mu], open the door." Clayde ordered.

The carriage was extremely spacious, and could easily fit five or six people very comfortably. This Ransome was one of Clayde's personal bodyguards, and he immediately said, "Yes, your Majesty." He quickly pulled open the curtain-door, letting in a blast of that frigid air.

But neither Ransome nor Clayde felt the cold in the slightest, despite the fact that Clayde was just wearing a jacket over some undergarments, while Ransome was wearing the traditional uniform of a palace servant.

"This Linley actually managed to damage his vitals due to over-training battle-qi. Jeeze." Clayde couldn't help but laugh while sighing.

Ransome said in a low voice, "That Lord Linley is still very young, yet he still has such accomplishments. No matter how talented a person is, one still needs to train hard. For a warrior to be able to injure himself internally due to over-training battle-qi shows to what extent he goes to when he trains."

The limits to a person's body's endurance might perhaps be very high.

But each time one tried to stimulate one's potential, one couldn't go too far. Although it was true that hard work was beneficial to a warrior in training, one couldn't go overboard either. The body wouldn't be able to handle it.

"Right. This Linley's future accomplishments will be unimaginable." Clayde nodded as well.

Seeing the look on Clayde's face, Ransome sighed secretly.

As Clayde's personal bodyguard, naturally he had a deep understanding of his master. With the forceful personality that Clayde had, it was very rare for Clayde to be so courteous to someone. But towards Linley, Clayde had never stopped being courteous for a single moment.

"It's a pity that, in that year, his Majesty...alas. His Majesty knows that he has no hope of entering the Saint-level, which is why he views Linley with such importance." Ransome knew Clayde's secret.

Although Clayde was a warrior of the ninth rank, Ransome knew...that unless the Radiant Sovereign was to bestow his divine power upon Clayde, Clayde would never be able to reach the Saint-rank, no matter what.

"Your Majesty, we have arrived at Lord Linley's manor." Ransome said softly.

Through the open door, the gate to Linley's manor could be seen quite clearly. At this moment, there were two powerfully built warriors standing guard outside the gate. These two warriors were elite members of ace divisions of the Knights of the Radiant Church.

"Crunch." The carriage came to a halt.

Ransome was the first to leave the carriage, then respectfully waited for Clayde to step out as well.

"Your Majesty!" Those two guards bowed respectfully.

"Oh, someone arrived before me?" Clayde noticed that there was another luxurious carriage stationed outside, along with a group of Knights of the Radiant Temple standing outside.

"Right. Lord Guillermo has already arrived." One of the two warriors guarding the gate said respectfully.

"Lord Guillermo has arrived? That's fine." Clayde glanced back at his own squad. "All of you stay here. Ransome, come with me." After issuing these orders, Clayde made his way through the gate, his personal bodyguard behind him.

.....

Right now, Linley was still engaged in conversation with Guillermo. Neither of them knew that Clayde had already reached the gate.

"This Guillermo still isn't leaving?" Linley was beginning to grow impatient.

If Guillermo intended to keep on chatting with him like this, who knew how much longer this would go on for? The longer this went on, the more complicated things would get. Growing anxious, Linley suddenly put a hand to his mouth.

"Cough. Cough!" Linley let out a few coughs, coughing so hard that his white face turned red.

"Linley." Guillermo was very surprised.

He didn't imagine that Linley's injury would be as severe as this.

"Linley, you must properly use this medicine I have brought you. They have the effect of assisting the body in healing its internal organs." Guillermo hurriedly said. "Your body isn't in good shape right now. Get some rest. I won't disturb your rest any further." Guillermo stood up.

After coughing, Linley's ashen face was even paler than before, without a hint of blood.

"Lord Guillermo, my sincere apologies." Linley said apologetically.

"It's fine. Get some rest. Your body is what's important." Guillermo reminded him yet again, before leaving the room along with his Vicars.

Just as Clayde and Ransome walked through the gate to Linley's manor, they heard a voice call out from behind them.

"Your Majesty. Your Majesty."

Clayde turned around questioningly, only to see Merritt quickly jump out from a carriage. "Your Majesty."

"Merritt, you came as well?" Clayde chuckled, coming to a stop as he looked at Merritt.

Merritt ran to Clayde. Respectfully, he said, "Lord Linley's been injured. How could I not come? Your Majesty, how could you go inside with just Ransome? It isn't safe!" Merritt hurriedly said.

When a ruler paid a visit to one of his subject's, usually he would bring all of his guards directly inside as well.

The first reason was to protect the safety of the ruler. The second was to display the ruler's authority and power.

"No need. I'm just checking up on Linley. No need to raise the flag high and all that." Clayde chuckled. "Much less, within the city of Fenlai, who is capable of posing a threat to me, hrm?"

Clayde's self-confidence wasn't without merit.

First of all, Clayde wasn't worried about most combatants of the ninth rank. The only type of person which Clayde truly feared was a Saint-level combatant, but would a Saint-level combatant come to assassinate him, a king? What's more, this was Fenlai City, the Holy Capital of the Radiant Church!

Who would dare to act rashly within the confines of the Radiant Church's headquarters?

"Right, right. Your servant was being too cautious." Merritt hurriedly said.

"Let's go. We can go inside together." Clayde entered along with Merritt and Ransome.

"Your Majesty, Linley is currently recuperating within the private courtyard in the east wing. Allow me to guide the way." Escorted by the pretty attendant, Clayde, Merritt, and Ransome began to head towards Linley's resting area. But halfway there...

Clayde and the other two saw Guillermo and his two Vicars.

"Lord Guillermo." Clayde, Merritt, and Ransome simultaneously paid their respects.

"Clayde, you came as well." Guillermo nodded. "This internal injury of Linley's seems to be a heavy one. Just now, he was coughing. When you go to see him, don't waste too much time. Just see how he is doing, then allow him to rest."

"Understood." Clayde nodded.

"Then I'll leave now." Guillermo nodded as well, then led his two Vicars out and left.

Clayde went with Merritt and Ransome to Linley's chambers.

Guillermo's departure had let Linley to let out a sigh of relief. But before he had a chance to take a breather, a female attendant came running in to make a report.

"Lord Linley. His Majesty and the Right Premier have arrived." The female attendant hurriedly reported.

"He's here?"

Linley's eyes lit up.

"I've waited so long. He finally came." Linley couldn't repress the excitement in his heart. "You can go now." Linley immediately ordered the attendant to leave, and then he calmly stood up, quietly awaiting Clayde's arrival.

Just a few seconds later, Linley heard the sound of footsteps.

"Linley." Clayde's voice rang out as soon as he entered the room. In three quick steps, he arrived by Linley's side. In a very caring voice, he said, "Linley, your face looks terrible. Quick, sit down and rest. Have a good rest."

Linley was pressed down to his seat by Clayde.

"Lord Linley." Merritt was very courteous to Linley as well.

"Thank you, your Majesty. Thank you, Lord Merritt." Linley said with a rather weak voice.

But the excitement in Linley's heart was beginning to swell. In the past, after learning of his father's death, Linley had instructed Hillman to take his clan's heirloom, the warblade 'Slaughterer', to the O'Brien Empire. At that time, he had already made up his mind that the risk of death would not be enough to sway his decision to gain revenge.

Father. Mother!

His father's death was linked to Clayde as well. If it hadn't been for Clayde ordering Patterson to abduct his mother, how would his father have died in an attempt to gain revenge? And of course, his mother's disappearance was Clayde's doing.

"Your Majesty. I'm fine. I've just suffered some internal injuries, and won't be able to train battle-qi for a while. I can still carry out my normal, day-to-day activities." Linley said with a smile.

"That's good. That's good." Clayde revealed a hint of a smile as well.

"Lord Merritt, you came as well." Linley suddenly 'remembered' something, and exclaimed happily, "Right! I haven't had the chance to drink the flagon of fine wine that you gifted to me last time, Lord Merritt. Since both you and his Majesty have arrived today, let's have a little drink."

As he spoke, Linley headed to the liquor cabinet next to him.

"No need. Linley, you've been injured. You can't drink any alcohol." Clayde advised him.

"It's fine. My wound is just a light one. And a little bit of wine is good to get one's veins active." As he spoke, Linley plucked out four wineglasses, along with a bottle of red wine. "Ransome, you should sit as well. At my home, there's no need to stand on so much ceremony."

Linley knew a great deal about Ransome.

As Clayde's personal bodyguard, he was an extremely powerful person as well. Although Linley couldn't clearly determine his power, Linley was certain that he was at least a combatant of the seventh rank, or perhaps even of the eighth rank.

"No need. I don't drink alcohol." Ransome shook his head in refusal.

As his Majesty's personal attendant, he had to maintain his wakefulness at all times.

"Linley, Ransome never drinks alcohol. No need to invite him to drink." Clayde shook his head towards Linley. "Linley, when Lord Guillermo saw me just now, he said you were coughing hard. He wanted you to have a good rest. It's best that we don't drink."

Not drink?

Nobody but Linley knew this, but the Bloodrupture poison had already been mixed in with this wine. If Clayde didn't drink, how would he be poisoned?

"No worries. Lord Guillermo is overly concerned about my welfare." Smiling, Linley poured everyone a glass of wine. "Your Majesty. This wine is exceptionally delightful. Lord Merritt, come. Let's all have a toast." Linley raised his own glass.

Clayde and Merritt had no choice but to raise their glasses as well.

A light ringing sound as their cups touched. And then Clayde, Merritt, and Linley each drank the wine.

"Paaah!"

Linley suddenly began to cough violently again, spitting out all the wine from his mouth. The coughing Linley's face turned a sickly red color again.

"Linley, I told you not to drink wine. You just had to drink." Clayde said in dissatisfaction. He hurriedly went over to help Linley.

"I'm fine." Linley smiled and reached out to stop Clayde.

Suddenly. Linley stared at Clayde. In a solemn voice, he said, "Your Majesty. There is a very important matter which I would like to discuss with you, your Majesty."

"A very important matter?" Seeing the expression on Linley's face, Clayde felt confused.

Chapter 28

Linley cautiously glanced about the room, saying in a low voice, "Your Majesty, just a moment. Let me order out the people who are outside." As he spoke, Linley

walked out the door, then barked at the two guards outside. "Both of you, stand down. Without my direct orders, do not permit anyone to enter this courtyard."

"Yes, Lord Linley."

Those two guards saluted respectfully, then left. Now, the only ones left in this standalone courtyard were Linley, Clayde, Merritt, and Ransome.

"Creaaak." Linley quietly shut the door.

"Linley, what sort of secret is this, that you even close the door?" Clayde chuckled.

Linley glanced at Clayde, laughing coldly in his heart. He himself knew that Clayde had already been poisoned by the Bloodrupture poison. As the Bloodrupture poison didn't actually cause any damage to the body, only prevent the generation of battle-qi, only after a person attempted to generate battle-qi would they discover that they had been poisoned.

"This affair really is quite important." Linley's face was solemn.

At this time, Ransome subtly moved closer towards Clayde. As the personal bodyguard of the king, Ransome was beginning to feel that this environment was vaguely dangerous. At the same time, Ransome also felt that as Clayde was a warrior of the ninth rank, and he Ransome was a warrior of the eighth rank, by all rights, nobody here should be capable of being a threat to them.

But one could never be too careful.

"Your Majesty." Linley stared solemnly at Clayde. "My mother left this world when I was young."

Clayde nodded. He had investigated Linley's background, and had discovered that Linley's mother had died in childbirth, while giving birth to Linley's younger brother, Wharton.

"I have no memories of receiving motherly love, only of the strictness of my father. My father was quite severe towards me in terms of both warrior training as well as all the education which nobles were expected to have. My father's requirements for me were very high and very strict."

Linley looked at Clayde as he spoke slowly.

Clayde was beginning to be confused. He didn't understand what any of this had to do with the so-called 'important matter' which Linley had mentioned. But as the ruler of the kingdom, Clayde showed a kingly poise and didn't interrupt.

"Your Majesty, I expect that you know that my clan, the Baruch clan, is also the clan of the Dragonblood Warriors." A slightly proud look was on Linley's face.

"That's right. One of the Four Supreme Warrior clans, the Dragonblood Warrior clan. This is an illustrious, ancient lineage." Clayde sighed with praise.

Linley shook his head. "We were only illustrious in the past. My clan had fallen so far that even our ancestral heirloom had been lost for hundreds of years. Each and every generation of Baruch clan leaders had desired to seize back this heirloom for centuries, but this never occurred. Your Majesty, when I was accepted by the Ernst Institute and left home, do you know what my father said to me the day I left?"

"What did he say?" Clayde looked at Linley.

"My father said, if in the future I do not bring back the ancestral heirloom of our clan, even in his death, he wouldn't forgive me!" Linley's body was trembling slightly.

Clayde, Merritt, and even Ransome all stared in amazement. A father could actually say such a thing to his son? "Your father went a bit too far." Clayde said.

"No."

Linley shook his head solemnly. "I understand my father's desire. My Dragonblood Warrior clan had been downtrodden for centuries, without a single truly powerful person appearing in all that time. My father understood that I would be the strongest person my clan had produced in centuries. Hundreds of years of hopes and desires all rested on my shoulders. Tell me, how could my father permit me to be a failure?" Clayde began to understand.

"My father's lifelong desire was to bring the warblade 'Slaughterer' back to the clan." Linley's voice was growing fierce. "At the Ernst Institute, I didn't dare to slacken off in the slightest. I trained like mad. I always remembered my father's wish, my father's instructions!"

Clayde and the others were beginning to understand Linley's motivations.

"Half a year ago, after I auctioned off 'Awakening From the Dream', I went back home, and that time, I brought the warblade 'Slaughterer' with me." Linley's voice rose to a higher timbre.

Clayde, Ransome, and Merritt were stunned.

Because they all knew that on that trip, Linley had found that his father had already passed away.

"But when I excitedly returned home, I was welcomed by the news of my father's death. Before he died, he didn't have a chance to see the warblade, and I didn't have a chance to see my father one last time either. All those years of hard work, my dream of making my father happy...unfortunately..." All the muscles on Linley's face were twitching, and the expression on his face was terrifying to behold.

Clayde and the others could all understand how Linley was feeling.

"Linley, don't be too heartbroken," Clayde sighed.

Linley sneered. "But, do you know why or how my father died?"

Clayde, Merritt, and Ransome were all startled.

"My father was killed, your Majesty, by your younger brother, Duke Patterson!!!!" Linley's eyes began to turn red.

"What?!" Clayde rose to his feet in shock. By his side, Merritt and Ransome were both stunned as well.

"Therefore...I killed Patterson!" Linley's voice was very sinister.

At this point in time, Ransome was the first to feel that something was very wrong in this room. He vigilantly inched closer to Clayde, guarding against Linley's actions. But suddenly, just at this moment, Ransome felt a gust of wind from behind. Ransome, a warrior of the eighth rank, knew that he wouldn't have time to turn his head, and so his only choice was to swing his arm behind him in defense.

"Crunch!"

An incredibly painful feeling...and then, Ransome could no longer feel his arm's existence. Only now did Ransome notice, from the corner of his eyes....

A rat-like magical beast, nearly half a meter long, was standing beside him. Aside from noticing the rat's blood-covered maw, Ransome also noticed its sharp claws moving extremely fast towards him. At such a close distance, Ransome didn't have any chance of dodging at all.

It was too fast!

“Snick.”

The sharp claws split apart Ransome’s throat. Ransome stared in astonishment, but gradually, the life faded away from his eyes.

He simply couldn’t understand where this half-meter long rodent-type magical beast had come from. The first thing he had done when he had entered the room was to scan it carefully. He only noticed a small Shadowmouse on the ground which was the size of a man’s palm.

Could a palm-sized Shadowmouse pose a threat?

To a warrior of the eighth rank, not at all. Ransome thus wasn’t on his guard against it at all.

And thus, being caught totally off-guard, this warrior of the eighth rank, Ransome, was easily killed by the Shadowmouse, Bebe. In truth, his death wasn’t too unjust. Given Bebe’s current power, even if Ransome had been able to fight him openly and fairly, he still probably wouldn’t have been able to hold on for too long.

“Ransome.” Clayde and Merritt were both shocked.

A stately warrior of the eighth rank died in one action. The two of them stared in shock at that Shadowmouse. Before their very eyes, Bebe’s body shrank down, returning to a fist-sized state, then leaping back onto Linley’s shoulders.

“Bebe. Well done.” Linley rubbed Bebe’s little head.

Bebe closed his eyes, luxuriating in the feeling.

Linley turned his head to once more stare at Clayde. That cold look in his eyes made Clayde feel very uneasy.

“Linley, what do you think you are doing?” Clayde barked coldly. At the same time, he began to activate the battle-qi in his body. But at that moment, Clayde suddenly felt that those wide open blood vessels in his body had suddenly been stopped up by something.

Based on the dense battle-qi which Clayde possessed as a warrior of the ninth rank, in the past the flow of his battle-qi was as powerful and forceful as the crushing waves of the sea. But now, he was only able to forcibly activate a tiny amount of battle-qi, and sometimes the flow would break entirely. Right now, the amount of battle-qi available to Clayde was perhaps only one percent of what was normally available to him.

"Your Majesty, don't shout and don't resist. If you resist, you die." Linley said calmly.

Clayde instantly realized what sort of situation he was now in.

Right now, just based on his muscle power, he could perhaps compete against a warrior of the seventh rank. But that little Shadowmouse on Linley's shoulders was capable of killing even a warrior of the eighth rank like Ransome in a flash.

Clayde didn't doubt in the slightest that Linley and his little Shadowmouse had the power to kill him in an instant.

"Linley, how dare you! You dare to attempt to assassinate his Majesty?" Terrified out of his mind, Merritt shouted.

"Shut your mouth." Linley cast a frozen glance at Merritt.

Merritt's muscle strength wasn't that powerful. Now that he was virtually totally unable to activate his battle-qi, he could perhaps be comparable at most to a normal warrior of the fourth rank.

Merritt quickly understood the situation as well. Not daring to shout at Linley, he still tried to persuade him. "Linley, you have a great future and lots of potential. In the future, you'll be a high-level official within the Radiant Church, and perhaps one day you'll even be the next Holy Emperor. Why must you destroy your future prospects? Linley, I trust that his Majesty won't blame you for having killed Patterson. He brought calamity upon himself when he acted against your father." As he spoke, Merritt glanced at Clayde.

Clayde nodded as well. "Linley, I am willing to pretend that nothing happened today. As for Patterson, he's already dead."

"Linley, his Majesty has already spoken. Don't act too rashly." Merritt hurriedly said.

"Shut your mouth!" Linley suddenly stretched his arm out.

Like iron claws, Linley's right hand stretched out and grabbed Merritt by the throat, suddenly raising him up in the air.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" Merritt stared at Linley, terrified, gurgling out his pleas.

"Linley." Clayde immediately called out.

But with a cold laugh, Linley flexed his fingers, and then let his hand relax.

“Crunch!” With a snapping sound, Merritt fell to the floor. He grabbed his throat, just barely managing to force out an ‘ah’ ‘ah’ sound. In the moments just before his death, he still couldn’t believe what had happened. He had come to visit today alongside King Clayde, and yet, this was the result.

As he died, Merritt’s life began to flash before his eyes. The last thing he thought of...was a woman.

“If I had known that I would die in Linley’s hands, then...that day...I shouldn’t have let Alice slip through my fingers.” This was the last thought Merritt ever had.

Linley was smiling coldly at Clayde.

“Linley, why are you acting against me? I seem to have treated you quite well.” Clayde looked at Linley, but at this moment, Clayde was hoping to himself: “Snow Lion, bring someone, quick, quick!” As a warrior of the ninth rank, Clayde had a magical beast companion of his own.

The Snow Lion was a Glacial Snow Lion, an eighth-ranked magical beast who came from the far north. Generally speaking, it would remain in the palace.

Because of the soul-binding contract which bound them, the minds of the Snow Lion and Clayde were linked. Thus, the Snow Lion immediately knew that Clayde had been a victim of an ambush. Clayde knew very well that right now...his priority was to delay, delay as long as he could!

“True, you have treated me well! But what about my mother?” Linley stared death at Clayde.

If it hadn’t been for the fact that in the past, Clayde had ordered the abduction of Linley’s mother, Linley’s father would still be alive, and his mother would be at home as well. His parents would still be alive! But because of Clayde’s actions, he had lost both parents.

“Mother? Didn’t your mother die in childbirth?” Clayde didn’t understand.

“Die in childbirth?” Linley laughed loudly, his voice wild. And then he stared coldly at Clayde. “That was just a cover story that we made up. Clayde, after my mother gave birth to my little brother, my father and her went to the Radiant Temple to pray. But that night, upon returning to their hotel, they were attacked and my mother was captured.”

"Clayde, could it be that you have forgotten that twelve years ago, you ordered Patterson to have kidnappers abduct my mother?" Linley stared coldly at Clayde. "Don't deny it. Patterson has already told me everything."

"That...that was your mother?!" Clayde was totally shocked.

"What, you remember now?" Linley's eyes were boiling with fury. "Tell me. What happened to my mother? Tell me, is she alive, or is she dead?"

Clayde said calmly, "Your mother, I handed over to another person. You can't afford to offend that person. Neither can I."

"Another person?" Linley totally didn't understand.

But at the same time, Linley felt a thread of hope in his heart. A person that even Clayde couldn't afford to offend had abducted his mother. There had to be an important reason behind it. Perhaps...his mother was still alive.

Clayde laughed coldly. "But I can tell you one thing. Your mother is dead. Without question, she is dead!"

"No..." Linley stared.

"You don't believe me?" Despite the situation he was in, Clayde began to laugh.

Chapter 29

Within the palace.

The Glacial Snow Lion which Clayde had tamed had ten or so servants dedicated solely to his maintenance. After having tended him for so long, the Glacial Snow Lion's attendants could already guess what the Glacial Snow Lion was saying when it roared.

"Where's the Snow Lion?" A white-robed male palace attendant said in a high-pitched voice.

"Milord, the Snow Lion is currently asleep." One of the Glacial Snow Lion's attendants said respectfully.

"Mm." The palace attendant nodded arrogantly.

“Roar! Roar!” Suddenly, a series of ferocious roars could be heard. The roars sounded frantic and worried.

Hearing the sound, the face of the attendant responsible for tending the Glacial Snow Lion instantly changed. The white-robed palace attendant was even more worried. He asked, “What’s going on? What’s wrong with the Snow Lion?”

Roaring furiously, the Snow Lion quickly charged forwards to them.

“His Majesty, his Majesty is in danger!” The servant charged with tending the Snow Lion was frantic. “Quick! Ten years ago, this happened once as well. His Majesty must be in grave danger! Quick, quick, go protect his Majesty! Milord, where is his Majesty right now?”

The expression on the face of the white-robed palace attendant changed as well. “His Majesty, his Majesty left the palace. Right. He went to Lord Linley’s manor.”

“Quick, quick, go protect his Majesty!” The attendant bellowed.

At the same time, the attendant directly leapt onto the Snow Lion’s back. After having spent every day feeding the Snow Lion, the creature held very little animosity towards him and was willing to let him ride atop itself. Just at this moment, five shadows suddenly flew over as well. These were five of the top experts of the palace.

“Snow Lion, is his Majesty in danger?” A golden-haired middle-aged man barked out to the Glacial Snow Lion.

The Snow Lion continued to bellow while nodding at the same time.

“Quick, to Lord Linley’s manor. His Majesty is there.” A jade-haired expert quickly said.

“Fourth Bro, you go find Lord Kaiser [Kai’sa].” The golden-haired middle-aged man shouted.

Lord Kaiser was the leader of these experts, and one of the most powerful combatants of the Kingdom of Fenlai. There were only a total of two combatants of the ninth level who had pledged loyalty to the Kingdom of Fenlai, with one being King Clayde himself, and the other being this Lord Kaiser.

Because of Lord Kaiser’s high status, there was no need for him to live long-term in the palace.

"Yes, Second Bro! You go protect his Majesty. I'll find Lord Kaiser." The jade-haired man immediately sped off.

"Snow Lion, let's go."

The four of them immediately sped off with the Snow Lion in the direction of Linley's manor.

Within Linley's manor. Right now, within Linley's 'recuperation' courtyard, aside from two corpses, only Linley and Clayde were present.

"No...how do you know that my mother is dead? Didn't you say you gave my mother to another person, a person even you dared not offend? I don't believe that a person like that would abduct my mother just for the purpose of killing her." Linley refused to believe it.

His father was already dead. Linley didn't want for his mother to be dead as well.

Deep in his heart, Linley thirsted for his family to be alive!

"Haha..." Clayde began to laugh while looking at Linley with pity in his eyes. "Linley, I can tell you clearly, right now, that person didn't instruct me to abduct your mother for him. I did it on my own initiative, abducting your mother, then gifting her to him. Because I knew...he really needed women like her."

"And I also know very well that in the past, this lord had acquired quite a few women like your mother. And all of them, without exception. Perished." A hint of mad laughter was in Clayde's eyes.

Linley seemed to have been hit by a bolt of lightning. His body swayed.

"Without exception?" Linley stared at Clayde.

Clayde looked at Linley with pity in his eyes. "Linley, you should've had an extremely resplendent future. But you insisted on choosing this path. Since you've already chosen this path, your future has now been determined as well."

"Haha.....hahahahahahaha!" Linley suddenly began to laugh loudly, all of the muscles on his face twitching.

Linley stared at Clayde with eyes like death. "Clayde. It was you. You were the one who harmed my mother, and in the end caused my father to die. If it wasn't for you, I probably would be enjoying a wonderful life with my parents right now. It was you. It was all you. It was you who ruined—"

Linley's hand stretched out, grabbing a straight chisel by his side.

"What are you planning to do?" Clayde stared at Linley with his tiger-like eyes.

"What am I going to do?" Linley stared at the straight chisel in his hands. "In the past, I always engaged in stone sculpting. But today...I want to try flesh sculpting." Linley's eyes had already begun to turn a dark, gold color, just like those eyes of the Armored Razorback Wyrms. Heartless. Cold!

Within the Coiling Dragon ring, Doehring Cowart continued to maintain his silence.

Having watched Linley grow up, Doehring Cowart understood Linley very well.

Linley deeply valued his family and his brothers. For the sake of his family and his brothers, Linley wouldn't fear death. Right now, the man responsible for the deaths of his mother and father were right in front of him. It was impossible for Linley to remain calm at a time like this.

"Flesh sculpting?" Clayde was startled. Linley's gaze was fierce, and he carefully inspected Clayde's entire body. "Don't worry. You have such a strong, powerful body. I am confident that I will be able to slice you a thousand times before I let you die, as a woman." Linley's voice was freezing cold, and the murderous aura rolled from him in waves.

"You!" Clayde's face turned icy cold as well, and he viciously snarled, "Linley, I will definitely kill you and let you reunite with your two unfortunate parents."

"Reunite?"

Thinking of his parents, Linley's urge to kill grew only stronger.

"Have a taste of my straight chisel technique." Linley's face appeared to be covered by a layer of frost. With a wave of his hand, he sent the straight chisel directly towards Clayde's waist. But once the straight chisel got within ten centimeters or so of Clayde, it was suddenly impeded by a strange force.

A translucent sigil suddenly appeared in mid-air, easily blocking Linley's chisel. "What is this?" Linley was totally shocked.

"I told you. I will definitely kill you." Clayde stood up, looking at Linley arrogantly. His powerful body made him look like an enraged lion.

"Impossible."

Linley's body erupted with Dragonblood battle-qi, and the straight chisel in his hands chopped viciously towards Clayde's body.

"Swish! Swish!" Seven chops in a row, all aimed at a different part of Clayde's body. But no matter where he chopped, his chisel would be blocked by that translucent pattern at around ten centimeters away from Clayde's body.

"You don't have the ability to kill me." Clayde said arrogantly.

"Raaaargh!" On Linley's shoulders, Bebe's mouth suddenly widened and expanded as he viciously bit down at Clayde. Facing Bebe's bite attack, Clayde didn't seem afraid in the slightest. Perhaps he was simply too confident in the power of this defense, as he didn't even try to dodge.

When Bebe's fangs crunched down against that translucent defense, the translucent barrier suddenly glowed with the seven colors of the rainbow for a moment, and then the colors vanished.

"Hrm?"

The expression on Clayde's face changed. "What a powerful attack." Clayde didn't dare to let Bebe bite him again, and he quickly charged towards the outside.

"Boss, attack him, attack him! That defensive barrier on his body isn't innate to him. It must be some sort of magical spell from a scroll or something. There's got to be a limit to how much it can take! Your attacks will whittle away its energy, and once the energy is gone, he will definitely die!" Bebe frantically urged Linley.

Linley immediately understood this logic.

"You want to escape?!"

Linley's skin suddenly began to be covered by black scales, and those sharp spikes began to jut out from his elbows and kneecaps. A long, iron-whip-like tail sprouted from behind him, and on Linley's back, a row of spikes erupted from his spine.

Dragonform. Total Dragonform!

Even in his normal state, Linley was already a warrior of the seventh rank. After Dragonform, he was an early-stage warrior of the ninth rank.

"Swish!" Linley kicked off from the ground, and as he did, the marble beneath his feet cracked. Transforming into a blur, Linley charged directly at Clayde. Right now,

Clayde was only able to rely on that comparatively pitifully small amount of muscle power to run, and thus couldn't move at high speed.

Linley's powerful, scale-covered right arm swept its claws ferociously at Clayde.

"Whap!" A terrifyingly powerful force smashed against Clayde's defensive barrier. Although this barrier was able to protect Clayde, it would still be impacted by the momentum of the force. It was as though Clayde was inside an incredibly sturdy carriage. When others attacked the carriage, although Clayde wouldn't be harmed, the carriage would be sent flying in a certain direction. Naturally, Clayde would be sent flying as well.

This was exactly that sort of situation.

Clayde's body was sent flying forward, then smashed directly into wooden screen. The wooden screen totally disintegrated from the power of this blow, but Clayde wasn't harmed at all. He rolled to his feet.

"Dragonblood Warrior. You actually can transform into a Dragonblood Warrior." Seeing Linley having truly Dragonformed, Clayde was totally stunned.

Before, Linley's strength wasn't that impressive. But after having taken on the Dragonform, he actually possessed the power of a warrior of the ninth rank. The fame of the Supreme Warriors really wasn't hollow.

"I can't let this continue. Otherwise, this Fateguard is going to collapse." The thing which Clayde counted on the most was this Fateguard. In the past, the Holy Emperor himself had bequeathed it to Clayde. This Fateguard came from one of the finest defensive magical scrolls in existence, and was powerful enough to allow Clayde to withstand a single blow from a Saint-level combatant!

Capable of blocking a full-power attack from a Saint-level combatant. As for a ninth-rank combatant, it could take dozens of blows before shattering.

"Clayde, I refuse to believe that the energy of your magical armor is endless and infinite." The totally Dragonformed Linley walked towards Clayde, step by step.

Seeing Linley with spikes jutting from his back, his entire body covered in scales, and in particular with that long, whip-like tail, Clayde felt he had encountered a human-shaped magical beast. In the past, he wouldn't have been the slightest bit afraid, but right now, he had less than a tenth of his usual power!

"Whoosh!" Clayde suddenly scurried forward, flying towards a window.

“Swish!”

Linley’s draconic tail swept over viciously. Despite moving later, it arrived first, landing directly on Clayde’s body. Clayde’s body was sent flying, smashing viciously at a corner of the window. Breaking through the window, Clayde’s body was sent rolling into courtyard. With a leap, Linley flew out as well, the ground beneath his feet splintering from his jump.

“You still want to escape?”

Linley’s Dragonformed claws and legs all ferociously attacked Clayde, while at the same time, Bebe continuously bit and scratched at Clayde, trying to whittle away the energy in his defensive barrier as quickly as possible.

Relying on his significant combat experience, as well as his natural strength as a warrior of the seventh rank, as well as the defensive power of the Fateguard, Clayde did his best to dodge Linley’s blows and delay as long as he could.

“Protect his Majesty! Protect his Majesty!”

“Roaaar!”

From outside, the sounds of many people shouting could be heard, as well as the roar of a magical beast.

“Linley, today, you are doomed to die.” Clayde was exultant. By now, he could sense that his Fateguard had only expended half of its energy. It had more than enough to continue to block Linley’s attacks. Linley’s gaze grew even colder.

“If one comes, I’ll kill one. If two come, I’ll kill a pair. I will kill however many come!” Linley’s killing intent had boiled to a crescendo.

“Whap!” Linley’s draconic tail smashed viciously down on Clayde, sending him flying into the courtyard’s wall, which immediately began to crack. At the same time, the sharp claws of a black blur fiercely swiped down at Clayde’s body, smashing Clayde hard against the ground yet again.

“Crash!”

The closed gate to the courtyard suddenly split open, sending its shattered shards flying everywhere. A five meter long, three meter tall lion with a body of pure white fur charged inside. From its mouth, it spat out hundreds of javelin-sized jade-blue spikes, while behind it, a group of palace experts charged in as well!

Chapter 30

The group of warriors who had charged in behind the Glacial Snow Lion were all shocked upon seeing the scene within the courtyard.

“What is this monster?”

The creature within the courtyard was covered in black scales, a back covered with a row of sharp spikes that gleamed with a cold, golden light, and an iron-whip-like draconic tail that swung back and forth. In particular, when this monster stared at them, they noticed its strange, dark golden eyes.

These dark golden eyes were filled with heartlessness, coldness, and murder!

“Graaaaaawr!” Not afraid in the slightest, the Glacial Snow Lion was the first to charge forward at the monster.

The Glacial Snow Lion spat a mass of jade-blue javelins from its mouth, but the monster didn’t dodge at all, allowing them to strike against his scales. With a thunderous clatter, the air was rent by the sound of the collision. The attack hadn’t harmed the monster at all!

“Fuck off!” A guttural, furious voice rang out from the mouth of the monster.

Its right leg suddenly transformed into a cylindrical blur and viciously smashed against the Glacial Snow Lion’s body. The Glacial Snow Lion was actually kicked away! This was a magical beast of the eighth rank, but it was sent flying away by a single kick.

But how could these guards know that having fully Dragonformed, Linley had stepped into the domain of a combatant of the ninth rank!

“Kill him, kill him!” Clayde howled loudly with rage.

Only now did those experts, who had been stunned by this scene, recover. Immediately, all of them let out angry cries as they drew their weapons and charged towards Linley. At the same time, the magical beast companions belonging to these experts also began to charge at Linley.

Magical beast, Frostwolf. Magical beast, Gorehorse. Magical beast, Mastodon. Magical beast, Bluewind Warbird.

One magical beast after another charged at Linley from the air or from the ground. Linley was like a whirlpool, attracting all of the nearby warriors and magical beasts to attack him. This sort of large-scale focused attack was truly very terrifying.

Linley's death-promising gaze was locked onto Clayde. Bebe continued to attack Clayde nonstop, reducing the energy remaining in Clayde's Fateguard.

"Clayde, today, I must kill you." Linley didn't care about the surrounding warriors in the slightest. Right now, the strongest person present was a warrior of the eighth rank. Although in his Dragonform, Linley was still just an early-stage ninth rank warrior, Linley had inherited one of the strongest traits of the Armored Razorback Wurm; an incredibly terrifying defense!

The attack of a warrior of the eighth rank, when landing on Linley's black scales, couldn't hurt Linley in the slightest.

The only large-sized man among them, a two-meter tall, massively muscled man with a waist like a bear swung a massive battleaxe at Linley. On top of the battleaxe was a layer of blazing red light, causing even the temperature of the air itself to rise.

"Fuck off!"

Linley didn't dodge at all. Balling his fierce claws into a fist, he punched at the axe with astonishing speed, splitting the air with the force of his punch.

"Bam!"

That massive, sturdy battleaxe was directly smashed into smithereens. Linley's fist didn't slow down in the slightest as it pierced through the warrior's chest. And even as his fist penetrated the man's chest, Linley's other hand came piercing in as well...

With a powerful tug from both arms, Linley ripped the warrior into two halves from within. Blood splattered all over Linley's scales, making Linley look all the more like a demon come from the pits of hell.

"Second Bro!"

The other three warriors screamed with rage. The one whom Linley had killed was one of those four warriors of the eighth rank. The eyes of the three remaining warrior turned red, and alongside their magical beasts, they all charged towards Linley.

"Whap!" Linley's draconic tail suddenly swept at them from the side.

One of the warriors who had intended to ambush Linley from behind, a tall, skinny, golden-haired man, was struck on the head by the tail. His head shattered, spraying blood everywhere.

"He's a demon, a demon! Everyone, kill him!" Terrified by Linley's display of might, everyone began to scream and attack.

More and more people were pouring in from the more distant courtyards, and even some of the guards that had been originally stationed to protect Linley came charging in to attack Linley as well. Because black scales covered Linley's entire body, even his face, nobody knew...that this monster was Linley!

In everyone's minds, this was a terrifying demon!

Kill it!

"Your Majesty, hurry and flee!" Two warriors of the eighth rank leapt over to Clayde's side. But just as they finished speaking, a black shadow charged towards them. These two warriors had extremely fast reaction times though, and with a tremble, their bodies became blurs as well.

"Ah!"

A chunk of flesh from one of the warrior's shoulders was bitten off, and that black shadow continued to attack that warrior. Relying on fierce claws and sharp teeth, in a very short period of time, over ten pieces of flesh were bitten off that warrior, and blood flowed from everywhere on his body.

Having lost too much blood and too much flesh, the warrior began to stagger and stumble.

"Crunch!"

A sharp paw directly slapped onto his skull, crushing it and killing him on the spot.

"Bebe, focus your attacks on Clayde!" Linley's voice rang out in Bebe's mind.

"Got it, Boss!"

"Whoosh!" Clayde had seized this opportunity to jump out the courtyard.

"Shiiiiirk!" Bebe's high-pitched screech once more split the air. Transforming into a black blur, Bebe smashed directly into the wall at high speed. The already-cracked wall instantly split apart, and Bebe charged straight through, attacking Clayde frantically.

“Kill this demon! Everyone, kill him!” Clayde commanded in a loud voice.

“Your Majesty!”

The people in Linley’s courtyard were growing greater and greater in number, and thousands of soldiers from the palace had come charging in to protect the king as well. Many nobles as well, having noticed the commotion, immediately ordered their people to protect his Majesty. The number of people in Linley’s manor could already be described with the phrase, ‘an ocean of people’.

People were everywhere!

“For honor!”

“For honor!”

A squad of Knights of the Radiant Church immediately rushed in front of Clayde, and all of them simultaneously attacked that lightning-fast black blur. For the sake of protecting his Majesty, a large number of soldiers were willing to ignore their own safety.

“Shkreeeee!”

Bebe’s high-pitched screech once more split the air, and his speed suddenly increased even further. Bebe’s strange blurred body, sharp claws, fierce fangs, and astonishing speed had transformed into the emissary of the god of death, and one warrior after another collapsed.

Bebe directly burrowed through some of their chests. Others were decapitated, their heads sent flying. The skulls of others were shattered...

Circling around and around, Bebe continued to attack Clayde. Clayde could clearly feel that the energy around his body was continuing to diminish.

“This pet of Linley’s is too terrifying.” Only now did Clayde totally understand how much power Linley had.

Right now, Linley had been totally surrounded and pinned down by an ocean of warriors. He was powerful, true. But under the mass attack of a huge number of magical beasts and warriors, even if he was able to kill a person in a single blow, he would still need to take a long time.

“I can’t delay. Once the Saint-level combatants of the Radiant Church arrive, I won’t have any chance at all.”

Seeing the crazed masses set against him, and the warriors screeching words such as 'For honor' and 'For his Majesty' and 'Demon', Linley grew more and more frantic. What's more, many magi were lobbing spells at Linley from afar as well.

"Whap!"

"Bam!"

Linley's body seemed to have transformed into a rainbow, as countless magical spells landed on his body. But Linley's defensive abilities were simply too terrifying. The Armored Razorback Wurm was praised as the dragon-type beast with the highest defensive power. There was no question about this.

"Shkreeee!" Far away, Bebe's screeching cry could be heard, but Linley was surrounded by a sea of soldiers and warriors. He couldn't help but feel frantic.

"Clayde!"

"Father! Mother! Today, even if I die, I will kill him. If worst comes to worst, then our family will reunite in the Netherworld! Little Wharton, I entrust the Baruch clan to you!" Linley said to himself. At this moment, Linley no longer cared about or feared death.

"Clayde!!!"

Linley let out a furious roar, and his scale-covered right arm touched his waist. Suddenly, a beautiful violet flash lit the air.

"Die, all of you, die!"

Linley began to slaughter!

Linley transforming into a tornado, and the violet light flickered around beautifully, its strange radiance flashing here and there. Every place Linley passed by, warriors would fall down, chopped in half or turned into meat paste.

The Godsword, Bloodviolet!

Given Bloodviolet's sharpness, especially when wielded by the Dragonformed Linley, even warriors of the seventh rank were directly chopped in half.

A massacre!

Wielding Bloodviolet, Linley's rate of slaughter increased tenfold. Wherever that purple light flashed, groups of warriors would fall to the ground. Linley was

charging forward in Clayde's direction at high speed. Every step forward, he was forced to kill ten people!

Kill!

Kill!

Kill!

Human blood spurted everywhere like fountains, and shattered bones lay everywhere, as common as mud. The black scale-covered Dragonformed Linley seemed to have truly transformed into a demon from hell. In the face of his massacring charge, one warrior after another collapsed.

Nobody could stop his advance!

"Bam!" With each step, Linley made the earth shake. Bloodviolet danced in his hands, and yet another body collapsed. All of the bushes in the manmade hill nearby had been eradicated long ago, and all of the walls in the manor had toppled as well.

Linley finally arrived by Clayde's side. Because of Bebe's constant attacks, Clayde hadn't been able to flee anywhere.

"Linley, must you kill me?" Clayde glared at Linley.

Linley's lips curved upwards, ever so slightly.

Must?

Ever since his father died and Linley had instructed Hillman to take the warblade 'Slaughterer' out of the Holy Union, Linley had made his mind up. No matter what, he was going to avenge his father.

"Hah!"

His Dragonblood battle-qi exploding, Linley's arms suddenly, bizarrely expanded in size by an inch, as his physical strength was pushed to the limit. Seeming to shatter and slice through the air itself, the Bloodviolet Godsword in his hands cut down viciously on Clayde's body.

"Bam!" Clayde was knocked flying by the force of that blow, and his body viciously slammed against that manmade hill. The boulders atop the manmade hill were sent flying everywhere.

His body turning into a blur, Linley once more appeared in front of him.

Linley seemed to have turned into a tornado, and as he turned, his right leg lashed out fiercely against Clayde's neck. Although this blow was once more guarded against by the Fateguard, Clayde's body was still smashed deep into the ground by the force of that blow.

"Whap!" Immediately following Linley's right leg was Linley's draconic tail.

Like a whip, it struck harshly again and again on Clayde's body. The power that was being slammed onto Clayde's body and through it into the ground was akin to a meteor striking the earth. More than ten large cracks appeared on the ground, and his body sank into the newly created crevice.

The translucent barrier protecting Clayde's body was beginning to tremble, and the seven-colored rainbow was flashing wildly, about to break at any moment.

"It's about to break." Linley exulted wildly.

"Protect his Majesty!" A high-pitched shout rang out.

"Lord Kaiser!"

The warriors who had been terrified by the way they had been slaughtered by Linley and Bebe were ecstatic. A powerfully built man with long, flowing jade hair charged forward, a greatsword in his hands. The speed of his movements weren't inferior to Linley in the slightest.

Linley's heart shook. "The second warrior of the ninth rank in the Kingdom of Fenlai, Kaiser. Not good!"

"Forget it." Linley didn't even turn to look at Kaiser. He quickly chased after Clayde, who had seized the opportunity to flee out of the crevice he had been smashed into. Clayde's Fateguard defend had been stretched to the limit, and could shatter at any moment. He had to seize this last moment to kill Clayde!

"Stop!" Kaiser howled with rage.

"Bam!"

Linley once again smashed a fist against Clayde, this time landing an uppercut on Clayde's jaw, sending him rising up in the air. Immediately following, Linley's body turned around at high speed and, like a pair of battleaxes, his right leg and his iron-whip-like tail struck in sequence against Clayde's body.

"Bzzzt." A very strange sound emanated from Clayde's body.

Clayde's body was in midair, and the protective barrier around him was trembling nonstop, glowing with that seven-colored rainbow. But just then, in midair, a black blur flashed towards him, sending a vicious claw against that seven-colored rainbow.

"Shatter!"

A clear sound could be heard, and the barrier around Clayde's body broke apart.

"It broke." Seeing this, Linley was wildly happy. He immediately charged directly for Clayde, but right at this moment, Kaiser arrived and chopped viciously at Linley with his greatsword. But Linley didn't care about the sword in the slightest, continuing to charge directly at Clayde.

But just at this moment....

None of the thousands of battling warriors in Linley's manor had noticed that a person was floating in mid-air, watching from above. Although this person was standing in mid-air, someone staring up at him from below wouldn't be able to see him at all. They would see nothing there.

He was very skinny, bald, and wore a long white robe. His face was calm, and he watched the proceedings below with the icy gaze of a god.

It was his Holiness, the Radiant Church's Holy Emperor himself!

Chapter 31

"As I suspected, this genius of the Baruch clan is indeed capable of Dragonforming. Although it isn't quite the same as the Dragonblood Warriors of record, despite his youth, he already has the power of a warrior of the ninth rank. The Dragonblood Warriors live up to their reputation as one of the Four Supreme Warriors."

The Holy Emperor of the Radiant Church, Heidens [Hai'ting'si], had a hint of a smile on his face as he watched the going-on's below.

The thousand-plus casualties below and the blood-stained earth wasn't enough to make the Holy Emperor's heart quiver even slightly.

"Kaiser, stop him!" Clayde shouted frantically.

Clayde had never imagined that despite being in possession of a Fateguard, that he would be beleaguered to this extent. What's more, it was within the Holy Capital of Fenlai City.

"Yes, your Majesty!" Kaiser called out in response, while sweeping his greatsword towards Linley.

Linley didn't try to defend against this attack at all. "Even if I have to take this blow head on, I am going to kill Clayde first." The death of his parents had filled Linley with boundless hatred towards Clayde. Only by killing Clayde would he be satisfied. Otherwise, even if he died, he would be unsatisfied!

"Thud!" The greatsword slammed against Linley's body.

Linley had been planning to take this blow head-on, but he suddenly realized that, bizarrely, this actually wasn't an attack against him at all. This blow was used to block Linley's charging momentum, while at the same time, Kaiser took advantage of the counter-force to knock himself flying towards Clayde at an astonishing speed.

"Swish!" Bebe once more charged towards Clayde.

"Bam!" That greatsword sliced through the air, blocking Bebe's way. Bebe used his fierce claws to exchange a vicious blow against the greatsword.

"Clang!"

Bebe only felt a fiery aura emanate from the surface of that greatsword, while at the same time, a fierce gust of battle-qi raged towards him. Bebe immediately dodged quickly, but nonetheless that fiery battle-qi struck his body. However, relying on his astonishing defensive abilities, Bebe only somersaulted through the air once before landing on the ground again.

Kaiser stood in front of Clayde, staring coldly at Linley and Bebe.

"Boss, this guy is really tough!" Bebe's fur was standing straight up, and he stared fixedly at Kaiser.

Linley could also sense Kaiser's power. In terms of speed, Kaiser wasn't a single bit slower than him, and when he struck with his sword, his speed was even more astonishing. This Kaiser was a true, full warrior of the ninth rank, with significant experience as well.

"Who are you? Why are you trying to kill his Majesty?" Sword in hand, Kaiser stared coldly at Linley.

Linley didn't speak. Tapping his waist, the Bloodviolet Godsword once more appeared in his hands. At the same time, Linley immediately utilized the wind-style supporting spell, Supersonic. A Supersonic spell of the seventh rank was still capable of raising Linley's speed a bit.

"A double expert, both magus and warrior." The expression on Kaiser's face changed.

"Clayde." Linley's guttural voice rang out.

Right now, there were a group of warriors surrounding Clayde, but as far as Linley was concerned, aside from that Kaiser, none of them were capable of opposing him.

"Swish!" Linley furiously stomped the ground, causing the ground to split and crack. Relying on that powerful counterforce, Linley transformed into a merciless black blur and shot straight towards Clayde.

"Whoosh!" Bebe, being spiritually linked with Linley, shot out at the same time.

"Chi! Chi!" The Bloodviolet Godsword transformed into a violet blur of light, piercing directly at Kaiser. With a flip of his wrist, Kaiser's huge sword moved with surprising agility to block Linley's Bloodviolet. But just at that moment...

That previously ramrod stiff Bloodviolet Godsword suddenly curved, avoiding Kaiser's sword and thrusting directly at Kaiser.

It was too close!

Kaiser didn't have the chance to dodge at all.

"Bam!"

Three centimeters away from Kaiser's body, the Bloodviolet Godblade suddenly came to a halt, ramming against a layer of blazing red battle-qi that was sprung up to protect Kaiser. As a warrior of the ninth rank, Kaiser was incredibly strong, even a bit more so than Linley.

This blow having failed, Linley didn't hesitate in the slightest, charging directly towards the nearby Clayde.

"Halt!" Kaiser let out a low shout, about to move to block Linley.

But from the corner of his eyes, Kaiser noticed a black blur suddenly arrive at the back of his neck. Kaiser knew exactly how terrifying this unique magical beast could be, and he didn't dare to use his battle-qi to forcibly block its fierce claws.

Kaiser hurriedly and agilely pivoted to dodge, putting some distance between him and Bebe. Flipping the greatsword in his hand again, he chopped directly at Bebe.

“Kaiser, come save me!” Clayde called out frantically.

Kaiser couldn’t help but grow anxious. Both Linley and this terrifying magical beast had, without question, the power of a combatant of the ninth rank. What’s more, that magical beast of Linley’s possessed both incredible agility and terrifying defense. Kaiser was confident in his ability to deal with one, but dealing with two was a major headache.

“Slash!”

As the Bloodviolet Godsword cut through the air, it left behind a trail of severed limbs and sprays of blood.

Linley’s dark gold eyes were fixed firmly upon Clayde, and he charged towards Clayde at high speed. Everyone who sought to block him was bisected by the Bloodviolet Godsword in Linley’s hands. Blood had already dyed every inch of Linley’s black scales!

With each step he took, he killed ten people!

“Slash!” After chopping away the last two warriors guarding Clayde, Linley charged directly towards Clayde.

“Don’t, don’t kill me!” Clayde was now truly afraid.

Kaiser was still being entangled by that astonishingly durable Bebe, and simply wasn’t going to be able to come rescue him. As for the other warriors, they were nothing more than an afterthought to Linley. The power of Linley in his complete Dragonform was enough that he would only fear a combatant of the Saint-level. Even most warriors of the ninth-rank would not be enough to make Linley afraid.

“Clayde, die.”

This time, Linley didn’t use his sword. With his right claw, he swiped viciously at Clayde’s neck. He wanted to rip Clayde to death with his own hands.

“Ah!” Clayde hurriedly flew backwards at high speed, falling against a manmade hill.

But with a single twitch of his legs, Linley once more appeared in front of him. Those fierce claws arrived directly in front of Clayde’s eyes.

“Father. Mother. I’ve finally avenged you.” Linley’s heart was shaking, and he brought his right claw down with force. The totally unprotected Clayde, in front of Linley, was like a toothless, claw-less animal.

Clayde’s eyes were filled with terror and disbelief.

“Thruuuuum.”

An extremely strange vibration suddenly emanated from the sky. In the blink of an eye, it totally surrounded Linley, making him feel as though he was sunken in quicksand. His entire body had been bound, and he couldn’t use any more force with his right claws.

If Linley were to use just a bit more force, he would be able to sever Clayde’s neck. But Linley wasn’t able to move at the slightest.

Clayde stared, stunned, and then he exulted wildly.

“Ha...hahahaha!”

Clayde began to laugh loudly, and then he slowly retreated several steps before raising his head to stare at the sky. At this moment, a white-robed figure slowly floated over from up above in the sky. It was his Holiness, the Holy Emperor Heidens.

“Your Holiness.” Clayde immediately bowed respectfully.

All of the warriors nearby, Kaiser included, were stunned. But then immediately, they all bowed very respectfully and called out respectfully, “Your Holiness!”

The highest authority within the Holy Union. The man with the authority to depose a ruler from his rule. The Holy Emperor, Heidens, had appeared.

The Holy Emperor walked one step at a time towards Linley, and as he did, Linley suddenly felt as though he had escaped from the quicksand and could now move. But facing the Holy Emperor’s gaze, Linley only felt his heart quiver.

“Your Holiness!” At this time, another squad rushed over, with two Cardinals leading them, along with several Executors from the Ecclesiastical Tribunal.

“Heathen!” Guillermo, seeing the totally Dragonformed Linley, was the first to speak, his face changing.

The Holy Emperor Heidens calmly glanced at Guillermo. Guillermo instantly fell silent, not daring to make another sound.

“Get out.”

Linley’s guttural voice rang out, causing the Holy Emperor Heidens to look at Linley with some surprise. Despite being affected by the power of his Presence, this man still was resisting? Heidens knew very well that his Presence was even more powerful than the presence of most Saint-level combatants, because Heidens was carrying several valuable treasures of the Radiant Church on him.

“Surrender.” Heidens spoke.

“Whoosh!”

Linley suddenly moved, transforming into a blur as he flew towards Clayde, while striking in an arc towards Clayde with that iron-whip-like draconic tail. Without question, the terrifying power of Linley’s tail was enough to kill Clayde with one blow.

Heidens suddenly made a waving gesture with his right hand. “WHAP!” Linley’s body was sent flying far away, slamming into a distant manmade hill. Rocks shattered, and blood began to seep out all across Linley’s body. From this single blow, his astonishingly sturdy scales had been shattered to the point of allowing blood to be drawn.

Heidens glanced at Guillermo.

Guillermo understood what Heidens wanted. He shouted an order to the Executors of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal. “Take this demon away!”

Instantly, four Executors charged towards Linley.

“Boss!” Bebe’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind.

Linley was half-kneeling against the manmade hill, and blood was dribbling out of his mouth. “Bebe. Leave. Leave now. While they haven’t noticed you, leave!”

“I won’t leave.” Bebe was crouching off in the distance behind the corner of a wall, but continued to mentally converse with Linley.

“No. With the Holy Emperor present, we no longer have any chance at all. He hasn’t noticed you yet, so you have a chance to slip away. Bebe...leave now. I must kill that Clayde. Even if I die, I need you to help me kill him. If even you are caught, in the future I will have no chance at all.”

“Boss...”

"Leave! Or else, even if I die, I won't forgive you!" Linley roared mentally.

In the corner of that wall, Bebe stared at Linley, his little eyes filled with fury, grief, and an unwillingness to depart.

"Leave now!"

Linley mentally howled with fury at him. At this moment, those four Executors had walked to Linley's side and reached out, intending to subdue Linley. But that half-kneeling Linley suddenly rose to his feet, like a praying mantis attacking from ambush.

"Swish!" A violet light flashed. All four of them were bisected at the waist.

"Die!" Linley charged towards Clayde once again.

The expression on Clayde's face changed.

"Even if I die, I will kill you first!" Linley howled with rage.

"Hrmph!"

The eyes of the Holy Emperor Heidens flashed coldly, and he let out a sneer. His right hand slapped in Linley's general direction, and suddenly, a terrifyingly powerful force appeared out of nowhere, surrounding and pressing down Linley from all sides. Linley felt as though an enormous mountain had just slammed onto his body.

"Bam!" Linley was slammed into the ground.

"Crack!" Linley felt that the bones in his body were suddenly broken in over ten different places. Totally paralyzed, he lay there on the ground, unable to move again. Nobody, no matter how strong, would be able to move with so many bones broken.

"Take him away." Guillermo once again ordered.

"Boss..." Seeing the sorry state Linley was in, tears were flowing down Bebe's face.

Linley was lying on the ground, totally paralyzed. All the bones in his arms, legs and ribs were shattered. He couldn't move at all. The black scales covering him were in even worse shape, and blood flowed out from the flesh beneath the scales, dying his entire body red.

"Boss."

“Leave! Bebe, leave!” Linley was mentally roaring with rage.

Several Executors of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal roughly lifted Linley up. Perhaps it was because they had just seen Linley murder four of their colleagues, but their hands were not gentle, and as they carried him, they didn’t pay any attention to his wounds. This sort of carrying method caused Linley’s entire body to be filled with agony.

As he was lifted and carried away, Linley continued to stare unblinkingly at Clayde.

“Haha, haha...” Clayde began to laugh again.

Staring at Clayde with those dark gold eyes, Linley roared furiously, “If I don’t kill you, I won’t rest! Even in death, I won’t accept it!” Linley’s voice made the heart of that far-off Bebe quiver.

Hearing these words, Clayde’s heart couldn’t help but quiver as well.

“I, won’t, accept it!” Two trails of tears cascaded down from Linley’s eyes. He had been so close to victory. But in the end, he had still failed to kill Clayde.

Chapter 32

Within the hotel at the end of the Greenleaf Road, Yale and a group of people were waiting.

“Young master. His Majesty suffered an attack from some sort of demonic creature at Lord Linley’s manor. Right now, many palace guards as well as the warriors of many noble clans have gone to protect his Majesty.” A golden-haired man in front of Yale said respectfully.

Yale was startled.

He knew that Linley wanted to kill Clayde, and now, Clayde was the target of an assassination attempt. Nine out of ten, this had something to do with Linley.

“I wonder if this so-called ‘demonic creature’ is actually Third Bro.” Yale began to worry.

But Yale could only wait here quietly. He had no other options. Shortly afterwards, another report came. “Young master Yale, that demonic creature has begun a wild slaughterfest. Too many people have died. Lord Linley’s manor has become a river of blood, and is littered with corpses.”

Yale secretly felt shocked.

“Third Bro is really formidable. But I don’t know if Third Bro will be able to escape in the end.” Yale could only continue to wait.

One report after another continued to come.

“Young master Yale, that demonic monster’s violet sword is far too powerful. Wherever that violet flash appears, death follows. Countless people have died within the manor. Of the palace guards, many platoons and even entire companies have been wiped out.”

Upon hearing this, Yale became even more certain.

“A violet sword? Could it be that Bloodviolet sword?” Yale, Reynolds, and George all knew that Linley was in possession of a Bloodviolet Godblade. In particular, Yale suddenly recollected something about Linley’s clan. “The Baruch clan is the clan of the Dragonblood Warriors. Can it be that Linley transformed into a Dragonblood Warrior?”

The so-called ‘demonic creature’ could very well be Linley after having transformed into a Dragonblood Warrior.

Thinking about how his beloved bro was currently being attacked by thousands of men and beasts and was engaging in a wild battle, Yale couldn’t help but worry even more.

“Third Bro!”

Yale’s fists clenched, relaxed, clenched, relaxed. All of the people present could sense his nervousness.

“Young master Yale. His Holiness, the Holy Emperor appeared. He heavily injured that demonic creature, and it has already been dragged back to the Radiant Temple.” The final report came back. Yale’s face turned white, devoid of all blood.

Upon hearing the words, “His Holiness, the Holy Emperor appeared”, Yale knew that things had just gone from bad to worse.

“Squeak squeak!” A black blur suddenly appeared within the hotel.

“Bebe.” Seeing this Shadowmouse, Yale instantly ran over to it.

“Bebe. Where is Third Bro?” Yale immediately looked at Bebe, asking desperately.

The little Shadowmouse, Bebe, didn’t have any of his usual exuberance. He only stared at Yale, then lowered his head and let out a few dejected squeaks. Yale could sense the grief and pain hidden within Bebe’s eyes. Although Bebe was a magical beast, his intelligence was no lower than that of a human.

“Swish.” Bebe’s body flickered, and he suddenly disappeared from in front of Yale.

Yale was startled.

“Young master Yale.” A nearby person said softly.

“Go back. Go find my Second Uncle.” Yale suddenly rose to his feet and issued orders to his men.

Within one of the more secluded private rooms on the ninth floor of the Radiant Temple. Linley had been tossed inside the room like a dying dog. For Linley to be imprisoned within the Radiant Temple was actually still a testament to how highly the Radiant Church valued Linley.

The Radiant Temple was the heart of the Radiant Church.

This was a place which even Saint-level combatants dared not to trespass into.

“Ah.” All the scales on Linley’s body had already retracted back inside. Currently, Linley’s body was covered with blood, and he had more than ten visible wounds. These wounds were all caused by the Holy Emperor, Heidens. His visible wounds were very serious. But his internal wounds were even worse.

The bones of all four of his limbs had been broken. Linley could only grit his teeth as he tried to force his body to move, but all he could accomplish was resting his head against the wall.

“Linley.”

Doehring Cowart flew out of the Coiling Dragon ring. He looked at Linley, and his eyes were filled with affection and helplessness.

“Grandpa Doehring.” Linley looked at Doehring Cowart.

Doehring Cowart sighed mentally towards Linley. “Linley, do you feel any regret?”

“Regret?”

Linley shook his head. “No. In fact, in this life, I have only two desires. The first is to reclaim the lost glory of my clan. The second is to reach the highest pinnacle of power and training that I can reach. But if I do not gain my revenge, I probably won’t even be able to sleep well. I would be in torment my entire life.”

Doehring Cowart nodded. He could understand Linley’s frame of mind.

“I lost. Haha. I lost.”

Linley laughed lightly. His entire body hurt. Right now, most likely any person at all could easily trample him.

He lost!

As soon as the Holy Emperor had appeared, Linley knew.

He lost. And losing meant death.

Linley had been aware of this long ago. In this world, many people died every day. Linley never believed that it was impossible for him to die.

“Linley, you probably won’t die.” Doehring Cowart said.

“Huh?” Linley looked questioningly at Doehring Cowart.

Doehring Cowart laughed calmly. “If that Holy Emperor wanted to kill you, he would’ve killed you long ago. How could it be that he would have acted against you several times, yet still spared your life? In addition...you haven’t considered the fact that most likely, a ruler of a kingdom holds less attraction for him than you do.”

Linley suddenly began to understand a bit.

“The second greatest genius magus in all of history, someone likely to become a Saint-level Grand Magus. And now, the Holy Emperor has discovered that you are a Dragonblood Warrior as well. Most likely, he would be all the more reluctant to kill you now. The Dragonblood Warriors are one of the Supreme Warriors. Upon entering the Saint-level, you will definitely be one of the most powerful Saint-level combatants. In terms of attack power alone, you definitely won’t be any inferior to the Holy Emperor himself!” Doehring Cowart said with certainty.

Supreme Warriors were very terrifying.

Most people, upon entering the Saint-level, would have to progress through the so-called early-stage, middle-stage, and peak-stage.

But upon entering the Saint-level, a Supreme Warrior, especially in Dragonform, would definitely be a peak-stage Saint-level combatant with incredible defense and offense. Even amongst peak-stage Saint-level combatants, the Supreme Warriors would probably be amongst the most powerful.

“A genius like you, Heidens won’t be willing to kill unless there’s absolutely no options available.” After finishing his speech, Doehring Cowart flew back into the Coiling Dragon ring.

Linley’s heart was very calm.

Life, death?

The thing which Linley truly cared about was vengeance.

“I’m afraid that even if he spares me, Heidens won’t allow me to kill Clayde.” Linley knew very well that having failed to kill Clayde this time, in the future, it would be very hard for him to kill Clayde. If he couldn’t kill Clayde, in his heart, Linley wouldn’t be able to accept it.

“Who knows when I will be able to get vengeance.”

Linley’s heart was filled with helplessness.

Within the highest floor of the Radiant Temple. The Holy Emperor, Heidens, was sitting calmly on his seat.

Guillermo was staring at the Holy Emperor in shock. “Your Holiness, that demon was Linley? But...but...”

At first, Guillermo hadn't known that person was Linley, but after the scales had retracted into Linley's body, Guillermo discovered his identity. This had totally shocked the man.

"That wasn't a demon. That was a Dragonblood Warrior!" Heidens glanced calmly at Guillermo.

Guillermo was startled, but then he quickly understood. "Right...the Baruch clan is the clan of the Dragonblood Warriors. But it has been over a thousand years since the Dragonblood warrior clan has produced a Dragonblood Warrior. It's unimaginable that...that...that Linley was actually...your Holiness, that was a Dragonblood Warrior?"

Remembering how terrifying Linley had appeared, Guillermo felt his heart tremble a bit.

"Perhaps a mutated version. But it should be a Dragonblood Warrior transformation, yes. Otherwise, how could he rise in power so quickly?" Heidens said calmly. "This Linley's potential is too great. Although this time, his offense was a major one, there are very few outsiders who know that 'demon' was actually Linley."

Guillermo instantly understood Heidens' meaning.

Linley's potential is too great?

Guillermo sighed to himself. Linley's potential was absolutely terrifying. Not only was his potential as a magus incredible, he was also a Supreme Warrior. In both aspects, he was a very terrifying person. If such a person could remain within the Radiant Church, in several decades, the Radiant Church would almost assuredly have another supreme combatant.

"Indeed. Your Holiness, others all say that it was a demon. Aside from those Executors who dragged Linley back, nobody else knows this demon was Linley." Guillermo said respectfully.

"Oh. Those four. Deal with them." Heidens said coldly.

"Yes, your Holiness." Guillermo said respectfully. "It is their good fortune to be able to return to the Lord's embrace."

Guillermo then said softly, "Right. Your Holiness, another person knows that the demon is actually Linley."

"You mean...Clayde?" Heidens said softly.

"Yes, your Holiness." Guillermo said. Questioningly, he wondered, "Clearly, this Linley has an extremely deep grievance with Clayde, otherwise he wouldn't have gone to this extent to kill him. Your Holiness, Clayde is the ruler of the Kingdom of Fenlai. If we are to preserve Linley, perhaps we should have a chat with Clayde."

"Yes, we should have a chat."

A hint of a smile was on Heidens' face. "I am very curious. What sort of deep grievance and enmity does Linley have with Clayde?"

Late in the evening, Clayde arrived at the top floor of the Radiant Temple.

“Your Holiness.” Clayde bowed respectfully.

The Holy Emperor, Heidens, was seated on his chair, leafing through a few thick tomes. Without even looking up, he said, “Clayde. In your opinion, who is more important to the Holy Union? You? Or Linley?”

Clayde’s heart thumped hard.

“The Holy Emperor means to preserve Linley?” Clayde’s heart began to grow frantic.

After having experienced this event, he now knew that Linley’s father and mother were killed as a result of him, even though he didn’t do it himself. In terms of responsibility for the deaths of Linley’s parents, he, Clayde, probably bore 90% of the responsibility.

That year in the past, if it hadn’t been for Clayde deciding to take Linley’s mother and offer her up, how could she have ended up dying? And how would Linley’s father have died?

Clayde remembered very clearly that look of unrelenting hatred in Linley’s eyes, even as Linley had been dragged away after being heavily wounded by the Holy Emperor.

“This Linley will fight with me until one of us dies. He cannot be allowed to live.” Clayde said to himself.

“Clayde, the outside world all believe that it was a demon. Nobody knows that it was Linley, yes?” Heidens looked at Clayde.

Hearing these words, Clayde even more was certain of the Holy Emperor’s intentions. He hurriedly said, “Your Holiness, that Linley truly is an incredible talent. Most likely, he is the greatest genius to have appeared in thousands of years, both as a magus as well as a warrior. He is an absolute genius. It is very understandable that your Holiness would desire to have him be of use to the Radiant Church. But...it is already determined that he will not be of service to our Church.”

These words from Clayde caused Heidens to frown. His eyes stared coldly at Clayde.

Clayde’s heart quivered in fear.

But he knew that if Linley didn’t die, then he would never have a moment’s peace again.

“Your Holiness, do you know why Linley wishes to kill me?” Clayde hurriedly said.

“Summarize.” Heidens said coldly.

Clayde immediately said, “Your Holiness, the reason Linley wishes to kill me is because twelve years ago, I sent people to abduct his mother. And then, his father, in the course of investigating his mother’s disappearance, was killed. His mother and father, it can be said, died because of me.”

“The enmity sowed by the deaths of one’s parents is indeed a great one.” Heidens nodded.

“But your Holiness, do you remember that woman from twelve years ago? That woman I gifted to you, your Holiness?” Clayde looked at Heidens.

Heidens started.

“Are you saying...” The look on Heidens’ face changed.

“Right. That woman was Linley’s mother!” Clayde said in a resounding, loud voice.

“Your Holiness, if Linley is to remain within the Radiant Church, then as his station rises, he will begin to learn some of the secrets of the Radiant Church. He will definitely discover how and why his mother died. By then...is it even remotely possible that he would still be loyal to the Radiant Church?” Clayde let out a mental sigh of relief.

He trusted that given the situation, Heidens would definitely decide to act appropriately. Yes, Linley’s potential was high. But the more powerful that Linley became, the greater a threat he would pose to the Radiant Church once he discovered the truth.

“If this is the case...pity. What a waste of a talent.” Heidens let out a single sigh.

[End of Book 06]